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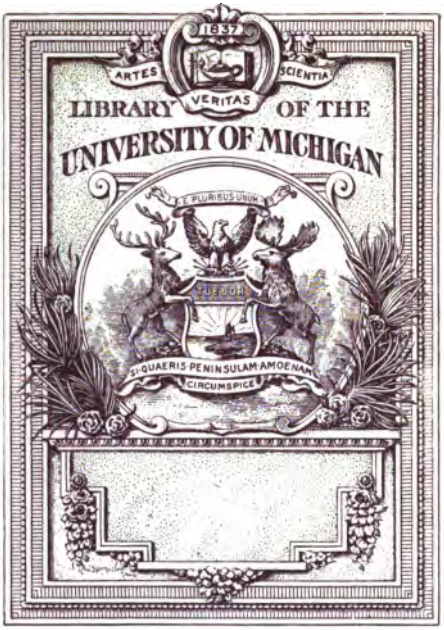
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THE

CASTLES

OF

ATHLIN AND DUNBAYNE.

THE

CASTLES

OF

ATHLIN AND DUNBAYNE.

A HIGHLAND STORY.

By

Ann Radcliffe.

——— FOR JUSTICE BARES THE ARM OF GOD,
AND THE GRASP'D VENGEANCE ONLY WAITS HIS NOD.

CAWTH.

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THE

CASTLES

OF

ATHLIN AND DUNBAYNE.

ON the north-eaſt coaſt of Scotland, in the moſt romantic part of the Highlands, ſtood the caſtle of Athlin; an edifice built on the ſummit of a rock whoſe baſe was in the ſea. This pile was venerable from its antiquity, and from its gothic ſtructure; but more venerable from the virtues which it encloſed. It was the reſidence of the ſtill beautiful widow, and the children,

of the noble Earl of Athlin, who was ſlain by the hand of Malcolm, a neighbouring chief, proud, oppreſſive, revengeful; and ſtill reſiding in all the pomp of feudal greatneſs, within a few miles of the caſtle of Athlin. Encroachment on the domain of Athlin, was the occaſion of the animoſity which ſubſiſted between the chiefs. Frequent broils had happened between their clans, in which that of Athlin had generally been victorious. Malcolm, whoſe pride was touched by the defeat of his people; whoſe ambition was curbed by the authority, and whoſe greatneſs was rivalled by the power of the Earl, conceived for him that deadly hatred which oppoſition to its favourite paſſions naturally excites in a mind like his, haughty and unaccuſtomed to controul; and he meditated his deſtruction. He planned his purpoſe with all that addreſs which ſo eminently marked his character, and in a battle which

which was attended by the chiefs of each party in perſon, he contrived, by a curious fineſſe, to entrap the Earl, accompanied by a ſmall detachment, in his wiles, and there ſlew him. A general rout of his clan enſued, which was followed by a dreadful ſlaughter; and a few only eſcaped to tell the horrid cataſtrophe to Matilda. Matilda, overwhelmed by the news, and deprived of thoſe numbers which would make revenge ſucceſsful, forbore to ſacrifice the lives of her few remaining people to a feeble attempt at retaliation, and ſhe was conſtrained to endure in ſilence her ſorrows and her injuries.

Inconſolable for his death, Matilda had withdrawn from the public eye, into this ancient ſeat of feudal government, and there, in the boſom of her people and her family, had devoted herſelf to the education of her children. One ſon and one daughter were

all that ſurvived to her care, and their growing virtues promiſed to repay all her tenderneſs. Oſbert was in his nineteenth year: nature had given him a mind ardent and ſuſceptible, to which education had added refinement and expanſion. The viſions of genius were bright in his imagination, and his heart, unchilled by the touch of diſappointment, glowed with all the warmth of benevolence.

When firſt we enter on the theatre of the world, and begin to notice its features, young imagination heightens every ſcene, and the warm heart expands to all around it. The happy benevolence of our feelings prompts us to believe that every body is good, and excites our wonder why every body is not happy. We are fired with indignation at the recital of an act of injuſtice, and at the unfeeling vices of which we are told. At a tale of diſtreſs

diſtreſs our tears flow a full tribute to pity: at a deed of virtue our heart unfolds, our ſoul aſpires, we bleſs the action, and feel ourſelves the doer. As we advance in life, imagination is compelled to relinquiſh a part of her ſweet delirium; we are led reluctantly to truth through the paths of experience; and the objects of our fond attention are viewed with a ſeverer eye. Here an altered ſcene appears;—frowns where late were ſmiles; deep ſhades where late was ſunſhine: mean paſſions, or diſguſting apathy ſtain the features of the principal figures. We turn indignant from a proſpect ſo miſerable, and court again the ſweet illuſions of our early days; but ah! they are fled for ever! Conſtrained, therefore, to behold objects in their more genuine hues, their deformity is by degrees leſs painful to us. The fine touch of moral ſuſceptibility, by frequent irritation, becomes callous, and too frequently

we mingle with the world, till we are added to the number of its votaries.

Mary, who was juſt ſeventeen, had the accompliſhments of riper years, with the touching ſimplicity of youth. The graces of her perſon were inferior only to thoſe of her mind, which illumined her countenance with inimitable expreſſion.

Twelve years had now elapſed ſince the death of the Earl, and time had blunted the keen edge of ſorrow. Matilda's grief had declined into a gentle, and not unpleaſing melancholy, which gave a ſoft and intereſting ſhade to the natural dignity of her character. Hitherto her attention had been ſolely directed towards rearing thoſe virtues which nature had planted with ſo liberal a hand in her children, and which, under the genial influence of her eye, had flouriſhed and expanded into beauty and

and ſtrength. A new hope, and new ſolicitudes, now aroſe in her breaſt: theſe dear children were arrived at an age, dangerous from its tender ſuſceptibility, and from the influence which imagination has at that time over the paſſions. Impreſſions would ſoon be formed which would ſtamp their deſtiny for life. The anxious mother lived but in her children, and ſhe had yet another cauſe of apprehenſion.

When Oſbert learned the ſtory of his father's death, his young heart glowed to avenge the deed. The late Earl, who had governed with the real dignity of power, was adored by his clan; they were eager to revenge his injuries; but oppreſſed by the generous compaſſion of the Counteſs, their murmurs ſunk into ſilence: yet they fondly cheriſhed the hope that their young Lord would one day lead them on to conqueſt and revenge. The time was now come

when they looked to ſee this hope, the ſolace of many a cruel moment, realized. The tender fears of a mother would not ſuffer Matilda to riſque the chief of her laſt remaining comforts. She forbade Oſbert to engage. He ſubmitted in ſilence, and endeavoured, by application to his favourite ſtudies, to ſtifle the emotions which rouſed him to arms. He excelled in the various accompliſhments of his rank, but chiefly in the martial exerciſes, for they were congenial to the nobility of his ſoul, and he had a ſecret pleaſure in believing, that they would one time aſſiſt him to do juſtice to the memory of his dead father. His warm imagination directed him to poetry, and he followed where ſhe led. He loved to wander among the romantic ſcenes of the Highlands, where the wild variety of nature inſpired him with all the enthuſiaſm of his favourite art. He delighted in the terrible and in the grand, more than in the ſofter landſcape; and,

and, wrapt in the bright viſions of fancy, would often loſe himſelf in awful ſolitudes.

It was in one of theſe rambles, that having ſtrayed for ſome miles over hills covered with heath, from whence the eye was preſented with only the bold outlines of uncultivated nature, rocks piled on rocks, cataracts and vaſt moors unmarked by the foot of traveller, he loſt the path which he had himſelf made; he looked in vain for the objects which had directed him, and his heart, for the firſt time, felt the repulſe of fear. No veſtige of a human being was to be ſeen, and the dreadful ſilence of the place was interrupted only by the roar of diſtant torrents, and by the ſcreams of the birds which flew over his head. He ſhouted, and his voice was anſwered only by the deep echos of the mountains. He remained for ſome time in a ſilent dread not wholly unpleaſing,

but which was ſoon heightened to a degree of terror not to be endured; and he turned his ſteps backward, forlorn, and dejected. His memory gave him back no image of the paſt; having wandered ſome time, he came to a narrow paſs, which he entered, overcome with fatigue and fruitleſs ſearch: he had not advanced far, when an abrupt opening in the rock ſuddenly preſented him with a view of the moſt beautifully romantic ſpot he had ever ſeen. It was a valley almoſt ſurrounded by a barrier of wild rocks, whoſe baſe was ſhaded with thick woods of pine and fir. A torrent, which tumbled from the heights, and was ſeen between the woods, ruſhed with amazing impetuoſity into a fine lake which flowed through the vale, and was loſt in the deep receſſes of the mountains. Herds of cattle grazed in the bottom, and the delighted eyes of Oſbert were once more bleſſed with the ſight of human dwel-

dwellings. Far on the margin of the ſtream were ſcattered a few neat cottages. His heart was ſo gladdened at the proſpect, that he forgot he had yet the way to find which led to this Elyſian vale. He was juſt awakened to this diſtreſſing reality, when his attention was once more engaged by the manly figure of a young Highland peaſant, who advanced towards him with an air of benevolence, and, having learned his diſtreſs, offered to conduct him to his cottage. Oſbert accepted the invitation, and they wound down the hill, through an obſcure and intricate path, together. They arrived at one of the cottages which the Earl had obſerved from the height; they entered, and the peaſant preſented his gueſt to a venerable old Highlander, his father. Refreſhments were ſpread on the table by a pretty young girl, and Oſbert, after having partook of them and reſted awhile, departed, accompanied by Al-

 leyn,

leyn, the young peaſant, who had offered to be his guide. The length of the walk was beguiled by converſation. Oſbert was intereſted by diſcovering in his companion a dignity of thought, and a courſe of ſentiment ſimilar to his own. On their way, they paſſed at ſome diſtance the caſtle of Dunbayne. This object gave to Oſbert a bitter reflection, and drew from him a deep ſigh. Alleyn made obſervations on the bad policy of oppreſſion in a chief, and produced as an inſtance the Baron Malcolm. Theſe lands, ſaid he, are his, and they are ſcarcely ſufficient to ſupport his wretched people, who, ſinking under ſevere exactions, ſuffer to lie uncultivated, tracts which would otherwiſe yield riches to their Lord. His clan, oppreſſed by their burdens, threaten to riſe and do juſtice to themſelves by force of arms. The Baron, in haughty confidence, laughs at their defiance, and is inſenſible to his danger:

ger; for ſhould an inſurrection happen, there are other clans who would eagerly join in his deſtruction, and puniſh with the ſame weapon the tyrant and the murderer. Surpriſed at the bold independence of theſe words, delivered with uncommon energy, the heart of Oſbert beat quick, and "O God! my father!" burſt from his lips. Alleyn ſtood aghaſt! uncertain of the effect which his ſpeech had produced; in an inſtant the whole truth flaſhed upon his mind: He beheld the ſon of the Lord whom he had been taught to love, and whoſe ſad ſtory had been impreſſed upon his heart in the early days of childhood; he ſunk at his feet, and embraced his knees with a romantic ardor. The young Earl raiſed him from the ground, and the following words relieved him from his aſtoniſhment, and filled his eyes with tears of mingled joy and ſorrow: "There are other clans as ready as your own to avenge the wrongs

wrongs of the noble Earl of Athlin; the Fitz-Henrys were ever friends to virtue." The countenance of the youth, while he ſpoke, was overſpread with the glow of conſcious dignity, and his eyes were animated with the pride of virtue. The breaſt of Oſbert kindled with the noble purpoſe, but the image of his weeping mother croſſed his mind, and checked the ardor of the impulſe. "A time may come my friend," ſaid he, "when your generous zeal will be accepted with the warmth of gratitude it deſerves. Particular circumſtances will not ſuffer me, at preſent, to ſay more." The warm attachment of Alleyn to his father ſunk deep in his heart.

It was evening before they reached the caſtle, and Alleyn remained the Earl's gueſt for that night.

CHAP-

CHAPTER II.

THE following day was appointed for the celebration of an annual feſtival given by the Earl to his people, and he would not ſuffer Alleyn to depart. The hall was ſpread with tables; and dance and merriment reſounded through the caſtle. It was uſual on that day for the clan to aſſemble in arms, on account of an attempt, the memory of which it was meant to perpetuate, made, two centuries before, by an hoſtile clan to ſurprize them in their feſtivity.

In the morning were performed the martial exerciſes, in which emulation was excited by the honorary rewards beſtowed on excellence. The Counteſs and her lovely daughter, beheld, from the ramparts of the caſtle, the feats performed on the plains below. Their atten-

attention was engaged, and their curioſity excited by the appearance of a ſtranger, who managed the lance and the bow with ſuch exquiſite dexterity, as to bear off each prize of chivalry. It was Alleyn. He received the palm of victory, as was uſual, from the hands of the Earl; and the modeſt dignity with which he accepted it, charmed the beholders.

The Earl honoured the feaſt with his preſence, at the concluſion of which, each gueſt aroſe, and ſeizing his goblet with his left hand, and with his right ſtriking his ſword, drank to the memory of their departed Lord. The hall echoed with the general voice. Oſbert felt it ſtrike upon his heart the alarum of war. The people then joined hands, and drank to the honour of the ſon of their late maſter. Oſbert underſtood the ſignal, and overcome with emotion, every conſideration yielded to that

that of avenging his father. He aroſe, and harangued the clan with all the fire of youth and of indignant virtue. As he ſpoke, the countenance of his people flaſhed with impatient joy; a deep murmur of applauſe ran through the aſſembly; and when he was ſilent, each man, croſſing his ſword with that of his neighbour, ſwore by that ſacred pledge of union, never to quit the cauſe in which they now engaged, till the life of their enemy had paid the debt of juſtice and of revenge.

In the evening, the wives and daughters of the peaſantry came to the caſtle, and joined in the feſtivity. It was uſual for the Counteſs and her ladies to obſerve from a gallery of the hall, the various performances of dance and ſong; and it had been a cuſtom of old for the daughter of the caſtle to grace the occaſion by performing a Scotch dance with the victor of the morning. This

victor

victor now was Alleyn, who beheld the lovely Mary led by the Earl into the hall, and preſented to him as his partner in the dance. She received his homage with a ſweet grace. She was dreſſed in the habit of a Highland laſs, and her fine auburn treſſes, which waved in her neck, were ornamented only with a wreath of roſes. She moved in the dance with the light ſteps of the Graces. Profound ſilence reigned through the hall during the performance, and a ſoft murmur of applauſe aroſe on its concluſion. The admiration of the ſpectators was divided between Mary and the victorious ſtranger. She retired to the gallery, and the night concluded in joy to all but the Earl, and to Alleyn; but very different was the ſource and the complexion of their inquietude. The mind of Oſbert revolved the chief occurrences of the day, and his ſoul burned with impatience to accompliſh the purpoſes of filial piety; yet he dreaded

dreaded the effect which the communication of his deſigns might have on the tender heart of Matilda: on the morrow, however, he reſolved to acquaint her with them, and in a few days to riſe and proſecute his cauſe with arms.

Alleyn, whoſe boſom, till now, had felt only for others' pains, began to be conſcious of his own. His mind, uneaſy and reſtleſs, gave him only the image of the high-born Mary; he endeavoured to exclude her idea, but with an effort ſo faint, that it would ſtill intrude! Pleaſed, yet ſad, he would not acknowledge, even to himſelf, that he loved; ſo ingenious are we to conceal every appearance of evil from ourſelves. He aroſe with the dawn, and departed from the caſtle full of gratitude and ſecret love, to prepare his friends for the approaching war.

The Earl awoke from broken ſlumbers,

bers, and ſummoned all his fortitude to encounter the tender oppoſition of his mother. He entered her apartment with faultering ſteps, and his countenance betrayed the emotions of his ſoul. Matilda was ſoon informed of what her heart had foreboded, and overcome with dreadful ſenſation, ſunk lifeleſs in her chair. Oſbert flew to her aſſiſtance, and Mary and the attendants ſoon recovered her to ſenſe and wretchedneſs.

The mind of Oſbert was torn by the moſt cruel conflict: filial duty, honour, revenge, commanded him to go; filial love, regret, and pity, entreated him to ſtay. Mary fell at his feet, and claſping his knees with all the wild energy of grief, beſought him to relinquiſh his fatal purpoſe, and ſave his laſt ſurviving parent. Her tears, her ſighs, and the ſoft ſimplicity of her air, ſpoke a yet ſtronger language than her

hear tongue: but the ſilent grief of the Counteſs was ſtill more touching, and in his endeavours to ſooth her, he was on the point of yielding his reſolution, when the figure of his dying father aroſe to his imagination, and ſtamped his purpoſe irrevocably. The anxiety of a fond mother, preſented Matilda with the image of her ſon bleeding and ghaſtly; and the death of her Lord was revived in her memory with all the agonizing grief that ſad event had impreſſed upon her heart, the harſher characters of which, the lenient hand of time had almoſt obliterated. So lovely is Pity in all her attitudes, that fondneſs prompts us to believe ſhe can never tranſgreſs; but ſhe changes into a vice, when ſhe overcomes the purpoſes of ſtronger virtue. Sterner principles now nerved the breaſt of Oſbert againſt her influence, and impelled him on to deeds of arms. He ſummoned a few of the moſt able and truſty of the clan, and held

held a council of war; in which it was reſolved that Malcolm ſhould be attacked with all the force they could aſſemble, and with all the ſpeed which the importance of the preparation would allow. To prevent ſuſpicion and alarm to the Baron, it was agreed it ſhould be given out, that theſe preparations were intended for aſſiſtance to the Chief of a diſtant part. That, when they ſet out on the expedition, they ſhould purſue, for ſome time, a contrary way, but under favour of the night ſhould ſuddenly change their route, and turn upon the caſtle of Dunbayne.

In the mean time, Alleyn was ſtrenuous in exciting his friends to the cauſe, and ſo ſucceſsful in the undertaking, as to have collected, in a few days, a number of no inconſiderable conſequence. To the warm enthuſiaſm of virtue was now added a new motive of exertion. It was no longer ſimply

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an attachment to the cauſe of juſtice, which rouſed him to action; the pride of diſtinguiſhing himſelf in the eyes of his miſtreſs, and of deſerving her eſteem by his zealous ſervices, gave combined force to the firſt impulſe of benevolence. The ſweet thought of deſerving her thanks, operated ſecretly on his ſoul, for he was yet ignorant of its influence there. In this ſtate he again appeared at the caſtle, and told the Earl, that himſelf and his friends were ready to follow him whenever the ſignal ſhould be given. His offer was accepted with the warmth of kindneſs it claimed, and he was deſired to hold himſelf in readineſs for the onſet.

In a few days the preparations were completed, Alleyn and his friends were ſummoned, the clan aſſembled in arms, and, with the young Earl at their head, departed on their expedition. The parting between Oſbert and his family may

may be eaſily conceived; nor could all the pride of expected conqueſt ſuppreſs a ſigh which eſcaped from Alleyn when his eyes bade adieu to Mary, who, with the Counteſs, ſtood on the terrace of the caſtle, purſuing with aching ſight the march of her beloved brother, till diſtance veiled him from her view; ſhe then turned into the caſtle weeping, and foreboding future calamity. She endeavoured, however, to aſſume an appearance of tranquillity, that ſhe might deceive the fears of Matilda, and ſooth her ſorrow. Matilda, whoſe mind was ſtrong as her heart was tender, ſince ſhe could not prevent this hazardous undertaking, ſummoned all her fortitude to reſiſt the impreſſions of fruitleſs grief, and to ſearch for the good which the occaſion might preſent. Her efforts were not vain; ſhe found it in the proſpect which the enterprize afforded of honour to the memory of her murdered Lord,

and

and of retribution on the head of the murderer.

It was evening when the Earl departed from the caſtle; he purſued a contrary route till night favoured his deſigns, when he wheeled towards the caſtle of Dunbayne. The extreme darkneſs of the night aſſiſted their plan, which was to ſcale the walls, ſurprize the centinels; burſt their way into the inner courts ſword in hand, and force the murderer from his retreat. They had trod for many miles the dreary wilds, unaſſiſted by the leaſt gleam of light, when ſuddenly their ears were ſtruck with the diſmal note of a watch-bell, which chimed the hour of the night. Every heart beat to the ſound. They knew they were near the abode of the Baron. They halted to conſult concerning their proceedings, when it was agreed, that the Earl, with Alleyn and a choſen few, ſhould proceed

to reconnoitre the caſtle, while the reſt ſhould remain at a ſmall diſtance awaiting the ſignal of approach. The Earl and his party purſued their march with ſilent ſteps; they perceived a faint light, which they gueſſed to proceed from the watch-tower of the caſtle, and they were now almoſt under its walls. They pauſed awhile in ſilence to give breath to expectation, and to liſten if any thing was ſtirring. All was involved in the gloom of night, and the ſilence of death prevailed. They had now time to examine, as well as the darkneſs would permit, the ſituation of the caſtle, and the height of the walls; and to prepare for the aſſault. The edifice was built with gothic magnificence upon a high and dangerous rock. Its lofty towers ſtill frowned in proud ſublimity, and the immenſity of the pile ſtood a record of the ancient conſequence of its poſſeſſors. The rock was ſurrounded by a ditch, broad, but not

not deep, over which were two draw-bridges, one on the north ſide, the other on the eaſt; they were both up, but as they ſeparated in the center, one half of the bridge remained on the ſide of the plains. The bridge on the north led to the grand gateway of the caſtle; that on the eaſt to a ſmall watch-tower: theſe were all the entrances. The rock was almoſt perpendicular with the walls, which were ſtrong and lofty. After ſurveying the ſituation, they pitched upon a ſpot where the rock appeared moſt acceſſible, and which was contiguous to the principal gate, and gave ſignal to the clan. They approached in ſilence, and gently throwing down the bundles of faggot, which they had brought for the purpoſe, into the ditch, made themſelves a bridge over which they paſſed in ſafety, and prepared to aſcend the heights. It had been reſolved that a party, of which Alleyn was one, ſhould

ſcale the walls, ſurprize the centinels, and open the gates to the reſt of the clan, which, with the Earl, were to remain without. Alleyn was the firſt who fixed his ladder and mounted; he was inſtantly followed by the reſt of his party, and with much difficulty, and ſome hazard, they gained the ramparts in ſafety. They traverſed a part of the platform without hearing the ſound of a voice or a ſtep; profound ſleep ſeemed to bury all. A number of the party approached ſome centinels who were aſleep on their poſt; them they ſeized; while Alleyn, with a few others, flew to open the neareſt gate, and to let down the drawbridge. This they accompliſhed; but in the mean time the ſignal of ſurprize was given, and inſtantly the alarm bell rang out, and the caſtle reſounded with the clang of arms. All was tumult and confuſion. The Earl, with part of his people,

ple, entered the gate; the reſt were following, when ſuddenly the portcullis was dropped, the bridge drawn up, and the Earl and his people found themſelves ſurrounded by an armed multitude, which poured in torrents from every receſs of the caſtle. Surprized, but not daunted, the Earl ruſhed forward ſword in hand, and fought with a deſperate valour. The ſoul of Alleyn ſeemed to acquire new vigour from the conflict; he fought like a man panting for honour, and certain of victory; wherever he ruſhed, conqueſt flew before him. He, with the Earl, forced his way into the inner courts, in ſearch of the Baron, and hoped to have ſatisfied a juſt revenge, and to have concluded the conflict with the death of the murderer; but the moment in which they entered the courts, the gates were cloſed upon them; they were environed by a band of guards; and, after a ſhort

reſiſtance, in which Alleyn received a ſlight wound, they were ſeized as priſoners of war. The ſlaughter without was great and dreadful: the people of the Baron inſpired with fury, were inſatiate for death; many of the Earl's followers were killed in the courts and on the platform; many, in attempting to eſcape, were thrown from the ramparts, and many were deſtroyed by the ſudden raiſing of the bridge. A ſmall part, only, of the brave and adventurous band who had engaged in the cauſe of juſtice, and who were driven back from the walls, ſurvived to carry the dreadful tidings to the Counteſs. The fate of the Earl remained unknown. The conſternation among the friends of the ſlain is not to be deſcribed, and it was heightened by the unaccountable manner in which the victory had been obtained; for it was well known that Malcolm had never, but when war made it neceſſary, more

ſoldiers

ſoldiers in his garriſon than feudal pomp demanded; yet on this occaſion, a number of armed men ruſhed from the receſſes of his caſtle, ſufficient to overpower the force of a whole clan. But they knew not the ſecret means of intelligence which the Baron poſſeſſed; the jealouſy of conſcience had armed him with apprehenſion for his ſafety; and for ſome years he had planted ſpies near the caſtle of Athlin, to obſerve all that paſſed within it, and to give him immediate intelligence of every warlike preparation. A tranſaction ſo ſtriking, and ſo public as that which had occurred on the day of the feſtival, when the whole people ſwore to avenge the murder of their Chief, it was not probable would eſcape the vigilant eye of his mercenaries: the circumſtance had been communicated to him with all the exaggerations of fear and wonder, and had given him the ſignal for defence!

The accounts ſent him of the military preparations which were forming, convinced him that this defence would ſoon be called for; and, laughing at the idle tales which were told him of diſtant wars, he haſtened to ſtore his garriſon with arms and with men, and held himſelf in readineſs to receive the aſſailants. The Baron had conducted his plans with all that power of contrivance which the ſecrecy of the buſineſs demanded; and it was his deſign to ſuffer the enemy to mount his walls, and to put them to the ſword, when the purpoſe of this deep-laid ſtratagem had been nearly defeated by the drowſineſs of the centinels who were poſted to give ſignal of their approach.

The fortitude of Matilda fainted under the preſſure of ſo heavy a calamity; ſhe was attacked with a violent illneſs, which had nearly terminated her

her ſorrows and her life; and had rendered unavailing all the tender cares of her daughter. Theſe tender cares, however, were not ineffectual; ſhe revived, and they aſſiſted to ſupport her in the ſevere hours of affliction, which the unknown fate of the Earl occaſioned. Mary, who felt all the horrors of the late event, was ill qualified for the office of a comforter; but her generous heart, ſuſceptible of the deep ſufferings of Matilda, almoſt forgot its own diſtreſs in the remembrance of her mother's. Yet the idea of her brother, ſurrounded with the horrors of impriſonment and death, would often obtrude itſelf on her imagination, with an emphaſis which almoſt overcame her reaſon. She had alſo a ſtrong degree of pity for the fate of the brave young Highlander who had aſſiſted, with a diſintereſtedneſs ſo noble, in the cauſe of her houſe; ſhe

wiſhed to learn his further deſtiny, and her heart often melted in compaſſion at the picture which her fancy drew of his ſufferings.

CHAPTER

CHAPTER III.

THE Earl, after being loaded with fetters, was conducted to the chief priſon of the caſtle, and left alone to the bitter reflections of defeat and uncertain deſtiny; but misfortune, though it might ſhake, could not overcome his firmneſs; and hope had not yet entirely forſaken him. It is the peculiar attribute of great minds, to bear up with encreaſing force againſt the ſhock of misfortune; with them the nerves of reſiſtance ſtrengthen with attack; and they may be ſaid to ſubdue adverſity with her own weapons.

Reflection, at length, afforded him time to examine his priſon: it was a ſquare room, which formed the ſummit of a tower built on the eaſt ſide of the caſtle, round which the bleak winds howled mournfully; the inſide of the

apartment was old and falling to decay: a ſmall mattraſs, which lay in one corner of the room, a broken matted chair, and a tottering table, compoſed its furniture; two ſmall and ſtrongly grated windows, which admitted a ſufficient degree of light and air, afforded him on one ſide a view into an inner court, and on the other a dreary proſpect of the wild and barren Highlands.

Alleyn was conveyed through dark and winding paſſages to a diſtant part of the caſtle, where at length a ſmall door, barred with iron, opened, and diſcloſed to him an abode, whence light and hope were equally excluded. He ſhuddered as he entered, and the door was cloſed upon him.

The mind of the Baron, in the mean time, was agitated with all the direful paſſions of hate, revenge, and exulting pride. He racked imagination for the inven-

invention of tortures equal to the force of his feelings; and he at length diſcovered that the ſufferings of ſuſpenſe are ſuperior to thoſe of the moſt terrible evils, when once aſcertained, of which the contemplation gradually affords to ſtrong minds the means of endurance. He determined, therefore, that the Earl ſhould remain confined in the tower, ignorant of his future deſtiny; and in the mean while ſhould be allowed food only ſufficient to keep him ſenſible of his wretchedneſs.

Oſbert was immerſed in thought, when he heard the door of his priſon unbarred, and the Baron Malcolm ſtood before him. The heart of Oſbert ſwelled high with indignation, and defiance flaſhed in his eyes. "I am come," ſaid the inſulting victor, "to welcome the Earl of Athlin to my caſtle; and to ſhew that I can receive my friends with the hoſpitality they deſerve; but I am yet

yet undetermined what kind of feſtival I ſhall beſtow on his arrival."

"Weak tyrant!" returned Oſbert, his countenance impreſſed with the firm dignity of virtue, "to inſult the vanquiſhed, is congenial with the cruel meanneſs of the murderer; nor do I expect, that the man who ſlew the father, will ſpare the ſon; but know, that ſon is nerved againſt your wrath, and welcomes all that your fears or your cruelty can impoſe."

"Raſh youth," replied the Baron, "your words are air; they fade from ſenſe, and ſoon your boaſted ſtrength ſhall ſink beneath my power. I go to meditate your deſtiny." With theſe words he quitted the priſon, enraged at the unbending virtue of the Earl.

The ſight of the Baron, rouſed in the ſoul of Oſbert all thoſe oppoſite emotions

tions of furious indignation and tender pity, which the glowing image of his father could excite, and produced a moment of perfect misery. The dreadful energy of these sensations exasperated his brain almost to madness; the cool fortitude in which he had so lately gloried, disappeared; and he was on the point of resigning his virtue and his life, by means of a short dagger, which he wore concealed under his vest, when the soft notes of a lute surprised his attention. It was accompanied by a voice so enchantingly tender and melodious, that its sounds fell on the heart of Osbert in balmy comfort: it seemed sent by Heaven to arrest his fate:—the storm of passion was hushed within him, and he dissolved in tears of pity and contrition. The mournful tenderness of the air, declared the person from whom it came to be a sufferer; and Osbert suspected it to proceed from a prisoner like himself. The music

ceased;

ceaſed. Abſorbed in wonder, he went to the grates in queſt of the ſweet muſician, but no one was to be ſeen; and he was uncertain whether the ſounds aroſe from within or from without the caſtle. Of the guard, who brought him his ſmall allowance of food, he enquired concerning what he had heard; but from him he could not obtain the information he ſought, and he was conſtrained to remain in a ſtate of ſuſpenſe.

In the mean time the caſtle of Athlin, and its neighbourhood, was overwhelmed with diſtreſs. The news of the Earl's impriſonment at length reached the ears of the Counteſs, and hope once more illumined her mind. She immediately ſent offers of immenſe ranſom to the Baron, for the reſtoration of her ſon, and the other priſoners; but the ferocity of his nature diſdained an incomplete triumph. Revenge ſubdued his

his avarice; and the offers were rejected with the ſpurn of contempt. An additional motive, however, operated in his mind, and confirmed his purpoſe. The beauty of Mary had been often reported to him in terms which excited his curioſity; and an accidental view he once obtained of her, raiſed a paſſion in his ſoul, which the turbulence of his character would not ſuffer to be extinguiſhed. Various were the ſchemes he had projected to obtain her, none of which had ever been executed; the poſſeſſion of the Earl, was a circumſtance the moſt favourable to his wiſhes, and he reſolved to obtain Mary, as the future ranſom of her brother. He concealed, for the preſent, his purpoſe, that the tortures of anxiety and deſpair might operate on the mind of the Counteſs, to grant him an eaſy conſent to the exchange, and to reſign the victim the wife of her enemy.

The

The ſmall remains of the clan, unſubdued by misfortune, were eager to aſſemble; and, hazardous as was the enterprize, to attempt the reſcue of their Chief. The hope which this undertaking afforded, once more revived the Counteſs; but alas! a new ſource of ſorrow was now opened for her: the health of Mary viſibly declined; ſhe was ſilent and penſive; her tender frame was too ſuſceptible of the ſufferings of her mind; and theſe ſufferings were heightened by concealment. She was preſcribed amuſement and gentle exerciſe, as the beſt reſtoratives of peace and health. One day, as ſhe was ſeeking on horſeback theſe loſt treaſures, ſhe was tempted by the fineneſs of the evening to prolong her ride beyond its uſual limits: the ſun was declining when ſhe entered a wood, whoſe awful glooms ſo well accorded with the penſive tone of her mind. The ſoft ſerenity of evening, and the ſtill

ſolemnity

ſolemnity of the ſcene, conſpired to lull her mind into a pleaſing forgetfulneſs of its troubles; from which ſhe was, ere long, awakened by the approaching ſound of horſes' feet. The thickneſs of the foliage limited her view; but looking onward, ſhe thought ſhe perceived through the trees, a glittering of arms; ſhe turned her palfry, and ſought the entrance of the wood. The clattering of hoofs advanced in the breeze! her heart miſgave her, and ſhe quickened her pace. Her fears were ſoon juſtified; ſhe looked back, and beheld three horſemen armed and diſguiſed advancing with the ſpeed of purſuit. Almoſt fainting, ſhe flew on the wings of terror; all her efforts were vain; the villains came up; one ſeized her horſe, the others fell upon her two attendants: a ſtout ſcuffle enſued, but the ſtrength of her ſervants ſoon yielded to the weapons of their adverſaries; they were brought to the ground, dragged into the wood, and there

there left bound to the trees. In the mean time, Mary, who had fainted in the arms of the villain who ſeized her, was borne away through the intricate mazes of the woods; and her terrors may be eaſily imagined, when ſhe revived, and found herſelf in the hands of unknown men. Her dreadful ſcreams, her tears, her ſupplications, were ineffectual; the wretches were deaf alike to pity and to enquiry; they preſerved an inflexible ſilence, and ſhe ſaw herſelf conveying towards the mouth of a horrible cavern, when deſpair ſeized her mind, and ſhe loſt all ſigns of exiſtence: in this ſtate ſhe remained ſome time; but it is impoſſible to deſcribe her ſituation, when ſhe uncloſed her eyes, and beheld Alleyn, who was watching with the moſt trembling anxiety her return to life, and whoſe eyes, on ſeeing her revive, ſwam in joy and tenderneſs. Wonder, fearful joy, and the various ſhades of mingled emotions, paſſed in quick ſucceſſion

ceſſion over her countenance; her ſurprize was increaſed, when ſhe obſerved her own ſervants ſtanding by, and could diſcover no one but friends. She ſcarcely dared to truſt her ſenſes, but the voice of Alleyn, tremulous with tenderneſs, diſſolved in a moment the illuſions of fear, and confirmed her in the ſurpriſing reality. When ſhe was ſufficiently recovered, they quitted this ſcene of gloom; they travelled on in a ſlow pace, and the ſhades of night were fallen long before they reached the caſtle; there diſtreſs and confuſion appeared. The Counteſs, alarmed with the moſt dreadful apprehenſions, had diſpatched her ſervants various ways in ſearch of her child, and her tranſports on again beholding her in ſafety, prevented her obſerving immediately that it was Alleyn who accompanied her. Joy, however, ſoon yielded to its equal wonder, when ſhe perceived him, and in the tumult of contending emotions,

ſhe

ſhe ſcarce knew which firſt to interrogate. When ſhe had been told the eſcape of her daughter, and by whom effected, ſhe prepared to hear, with impatient ſolicitude, news of her beloved ſon, and the means by which the brave young Highlander had eluded the vigilance of the Baron. Of the Earl, Alleyn could only inform the Counteſs, that he was taken priſoner with himſelf, within the walls of the fortreſs, as they fought ſide by ſide; that he was conducted, unwounded, to a tower ſituated on the eaſt angle of the caſtle, where he was ſtill confined. Himſelf had been impriſoned in a diſtant part of the pile, and had been able to collect no other particulars of the Earl's ſituation, than thoſe he had related. Of himſelf he gave a brief relation of the following circumſtances:

After having lain ſome weeks in the horrible dungeon allotted him, his mind

mind involved in the gloom of deſpair, and filled with the momentary expectation of death, deſperation furniſhed him with invention, and he concerted the following plan of eſcape:—He had obſerved, that the guard who brought him his allowance of food, on quitting the dungeon, conſtantly ſounded his ſpear againſt the pavement near the entrance. This circumſtance excited his ſurprize and curioſity. A ray of hope beamed through the gloom of his dungeon. He examined the ſpot, as well as the obſcurity of the place would permit; it was paved with flag ſtones like the other parts of the cell, and the paving was every where equally firm. He, however, became certain, that ſome means of eſcape was concealed beneath that part, for the guard was conſtant in examining it by ſtriking that ſpot, and treading more firmly on it; and this he endeavoured to do without being obſerved. One day, immediately after the

the departure of the guard, Alleyn ſet himſelf to unfaſten the pavement; this, with much patience and induſtry, he effected, by means of a ſmall knife which had eſcaped the ſearch of the ſoldiers. He found the earth beneath hard, and without any ſymptoms of being lately diſturbed; but after digging a few feet, he arrived at a trap door; he trembled with eagerneſs. It was now almoſt night, and he was overcome with wearineſs; he doubted whether he ſhould be able to penetrate through the door, and what other obſtructions were behind it, before the next day. He therefore, threw the earth again into the hole, and endeavoured to cloſe the pavement; with much difficulty, he trod the earth into the opening, but the pavement he was unable exactly to replace. It was too dark to examine the ſtones; and he found, that even if he ſhould be able to make them fit, the pavement could not be made firm. His mind and body

were now overcome, and he threw himſelf on the ground in an agony of deſpair. It was midnight, when the return of his ſtrength and ſpirits produced another effort. He tore the earth up with haſty violence, cut round the lock of the trap door, and raiſing it, unwilling to heſitate or conſider, ſprung through the aperture. The vault was of conſiderable depth, and he was thrown down by the violence of the fall: an hollow echo, which ſeemed to murmur at a diſtance, convinced him that the place was of conſiderable extent. He had no light to direct him, and was therefore obliged to walk with his arms extended, in ſilent and fearful examination. After having wandered through the void a conſiderable time, he came to a wall, along which he groped with anxious care; it conducted him onward for a length of way: it turned; he followed, and his hand touched the cold iron work of a barred window.

He felt the gentle undulation of the air upon his face; and to him, who had been ſo long confined among the damp vapours of a dungeon, this was a moment of luxury. The air gave him ſtrength; and the means of eſcape, which now ſeemed preſented to him, renewed his courage. He ſet his foot againſt the wall, and graſping a bar with his hand, found it gradually yield to his ſtrength, and by ſucceſſive efforts, he entirely diſplaced it. He attempted another, but it was more firmly fixed, and every effort to looſen it was ineffectual; he found that it was faſtened in a large ſtone of the wall, and that to remove this ſtone, was his only means of diſplacing the bar; he ſet himſelf, therefore, again to work with his knife, and with much patience, looſened the mortar ſufficiently to effect his purpoſe. After ſome hours, for the darkneſs made his labour tedious, and ſometimes ineffectual, he had removed ſeveral of the bars,

bars, and had made an opening almoſt ſufficient to permit his eſcape, when the dawn of light appeared; he now diſcovered, with inexpreſſible anguiſh, that the grate opened into an inner court of the caſtle, and even while he heſitated, he could perceive ſoldiers deſcending ſlowly into the court, from the narrow ſtaircaſes which led to their apartments. His heart ſickened at the ſight. He reſted againſt the wall in a pauſe of deſpair, and was on the point of ſpringing into the court, to make a deſperate effort at eſcape, or die in the attempt, when he perceived, by the encreaſing light which fell acroſs the vault, a maſſy door in the oppoſite wall; he ran towards it, and endeavoured to open it; it was faſtened by a lock and ſeveral bolts. He ſtruck againſt it with his foot, and the hollow ſound which was returned, convinced him that there were vaults beyond; and by the direction of theſe

vaults, he was certain that they muſt extend to the outer walls of the caſtle; if he could gain theſe vaults, and penetrate beyond them in the darkneſs of the enſuing night, it would be eaſy to leap the wall, and croſs the ditch; but it was impoſſible to cut away the lock, before the return of his guard, who regularly viſited the cell ſoon after the dawn of day. After ſome conſideration, therefore, he determined to ſecrete himſelf in a dark part of the vault, and there await the entrance of the guard, who on obſerving the deranged bars of the grate, would conclude, that he had eſcaped through the aperture. He had ſcarcely placed himſelf according to his plan, when he heard the door of the dungeon unbolted; this was inſtantly followed by a loud voice, which ſounded down the opening, and "Alleyn" was ſhouted in a tone of fright and conſternation. After repeating the call, a man jumped into the vault. Alleyn, though himſelf

himſelf concealed in darkneſs, could perceive, by the faint light which fell upon the ſpot, a ſoldier with a drawn ſword in his hand. He approached the grate with execrations, examined it, and proceeded to the door; it was faſt; he returned to the grate, and then proceeded along the walls, tracing them with the point of his ſword. He at length approached the ſpot where Alleyn was concealed, who felt the ſword ſtrike upon his arm, and inſtantly graſping the hand which held it, the weapon fell to the ground. A ſhort ſcuffle enſued; Alleyn threw down his adverſary, and ſtanding over him, ſeized the ſword, and preſented it to his breaſt; the ſoldier called for mercy. Alleyn, always unwilling to take the life of another, and conſidering that if the ſoldier was ſlain, his comrades would certainly follow to the vault, returned him his ſword. "Take your life," ſaid he, "your death can avail me nothing;—take it, and if you

can, go tell Malcolm, that an innocent man has endeavoured to eſcape deſtruction." The guard, ſtruck with his conduct, aroſe from the ground in ſilence, he received his ſword, and followed Alleyn to the trap door. They returned into the dungeon, where Alleyn was once more left alone. The ſoldier, undetermined how to act, went to find his comrades; on the way he met Malcolm, who, ever reſtleſs and vigilant, frequently walked the ramparts at an early hour. He enquired if all was well. The ſoldier, fearful of diſcovery, and unaccuſtomed to diſſemble, heſitated at the queſtion; and the ſtern air aſſumed by Malcolm, compelled him to relate what had happened. The Baron, with much harſhneſs, reprobated his neglect, and immediately followed him to the dungeon, where he loaded Alleyn with inſult. He examined the cell, deſcended into the vault, and returning to the dungeon, ſtood by, while a chain, which had

had been fetched from a diſtant part of the caſtle, was fixed into the wall;—to this Alleyn was faſtened. "We will not long confine you thus," ſaid Malcolm, as he quitted the cell, "a few days ſhall reſtore you to the liberty you are ſo fond of; but as a conqueror ought to have ſpectators of his triumph, you muſt wait till a number is collected ſufficient to witneſs the death of ſo great an hero." "I diſdain your inſults," returned Alleyn, "and am equally able to ſupport misfortune, and to deſpiſe a tyrant." Malcolm retired, enraged at the boldneſs of his priſoner, and uttering menaces on the careleſſneſs of the guard, who vainly endeavoured to juſtify himſelf. "His ſafety be upon your head," ſaid the Baron. The ſoldier was ſhocked, and turned away in ſullen ſilence. Dread of his priſoner's effecting an eſcape, now ſeized his mind; the words of Malcolm filled him with reſentment, while gratitude towards

If this door could be opened, their eſcape was almoſt certain. They conſulted on the meaſures neceſſary to be taken. The ſoldier gave Alleyn a knife larger than the one he had, and directed him to cut round the lock, which was all that with-held their paſſage. Edric's office of centinel was propitious to their ſcheme, and it was agreed that at midnight they ſhould deſcend the vaults. Edric, after having unfaſtened the chain, left the cell, and Alleyn ſet himſelf again to remove the pavement, which had been already re-placed by order of the Baron. The near proſpect of deliverance now gladdened his ſpirits; his knife was better formed for his purpoſe; and he worked with alacrity and eaſe. He arrived at the trap door, and once more leaped into the vault. He applied himſelf to the lock of the door, which was extremely thick, and it was with difficulty he ſeparated them; with trembling hands he undrew

drew the bolts, the door uncloſed, and diſcovered to him the vaults. It was evening when he finiſhed his work. He was but juſt returned to the dungeon, and had thrown himſelf on the ground to reſt, when the ſound of a diſtant ſtep caught his ear; he liſtened to its advance with trembling eagerneſs. At length the door was unbolted; Alleyn, breathleſs with expectation, ſtarted up, and beheld not his ſoldier, but another; the opening was again diſcovered, and all was now over. The ſoldier brought a pitcher of water, and caſting round the place a look of ſullen ſcrutiny, departed in ſilence. The ſtretch of human endurance was now exceeded, and Alleyn ſunk down in a ſtate of torpidity. On recovering, he found himſelf again enveloped in the horrors of darkneſs, ſilence, and deſpair. Yet amid all his ſufferings, he diſdained to doubt the integrity of his ſoldier: we naturally recoil from painful ſenſations, and it is

one of the moſt exquiſite tortures of a noble mind, to doubt the ſincerity of thoſe in whom it has confided. Alleyn concluded, that the converſation of the morning had been overheard, and that this guard had been ſent to examine the cell, and to watch his movements. He believed that Edric was now, by his own generoſity, involved in deſtruction; and in the energy of this thought, he forgot for a moment his own ſituation.

Midnight came, but Edric did not appear; his doubts were now confirmed into certainty, and he reſigned himſelf to the horrid tranquillity of mute deſpair. He heard, from a diſtance, the clock of the caſtle ſtrike one; it ſeemed to ſound the knell of death; it rouſed his benumbed ſenſes, and he roſe from the ground in an agony of acuteſt recollecton. Suddenly he heard the ſteps of two perſons advancing down the avenue; he ſtarted, and liſtened.

tened. Malcolm and murder aroſe to his mind; he doubted not that the ſoldier had reported what he had ſeen in the evening, and that the perſons whom he now heard, were coming to execute the final orders of the Baron. They now drew near the dungeon, when ſuddenly he remembered the door in the vault. His ſenſes had been ſo ſtunned by the appearance of the ſtranger, and his mind ſo occupied with a feeling of deſpair, as to exclude every idea of eſcape; and in the energy of his ſufferings he had forgot this laſt reſource. It now flaſhed like lightning upon his mind; he ſprung to the trap door, and his feet had ſcarcely touched the bottom of the vault, when he heard the bolts of the dungeon undraw; he had juſt reached the entrance of the inner vault, when a voice ſounded from above. He pauſed, and knew it to be Edric's. Apprehenſion ſo entirely poſſeſſed his mind, that he heſitated whether he

ſhould diſcover himſelf; but a moment of recollection diſſipated every ignoble ſuſpicion of Edric's fidelity, and he anſwered the call. Immediately Edric deſcended, followed by the ſoldier whoſe former appearance had filled Alleyn with deſpair, and whom Edric now introduced as his faithful friend and comrade, who, like himſelf, was weary of the oppreſſion of Malcolm, and who had reſolved to fly with them, and eſcape his rigour. This was a moment of happineſs too great for thought! Alleyn, in the confuſion of his joy, and in his impatience to ſeize the moment of deliverance, ſcarcely heard the words of Edric. Edric having returned to faſten the door of the dungeon, to delay purſuit, and given Alleyn a ſword which he had brought for him, led the way through the vaults. The profound ſilence of the place was interrupted only by the echoes of their footſteps, which running through the dreary chaſms

chaſms in confuſed whiſperings, filled their imaginations with terror. In traverſing theſe gloomy and deſolate receſſes they often pauſed to liſten, and often did their fears give them the diſtant ſounds of purſuit. On quitting the vaults, they entered an avenue, winding, and of conſiderable length, from whence branched ſeveral paſſages into the rock. It was cloſed by a low and narrow door, which opened upon a flight of ſteps, that led to the ſubterraneous way under the ditch of the caſtle. Edric knew the intricacies of the place: they entered, and cloſing the door began to deſcend, when the lamp which Edric carried in his hand was blown out by the current of the wind, and they were left in total darkneſs. Their feelings may be more eaſily imagined than deſcribed; they had, however, no way but to proceed, and grope with cautious ſteps the dark abyſs. Having continued to deſcend for ſome time, their

their feet reached the bottom, and they found themſelves once more on even ground; but Edric knew they had yet another flight to encounter, before they could gain the ſubterraneous paſſage under the foſſé, and for which it required their utmoſt caution to ſearch. They were proceeding with ſlow and wary ſteps, when the foot of Alleyn ſtumbled upon ſomething which clattered like broken armour, and endeavouring to throw it from him, he felt the weight reſiſt his effort: he ſtooped to diſcover what it was, and found in his graſp the cold hand of a dead perſon. Every nerve thrilled with horror at the touch, and he ſtarted back in an agony of terror. They remained for ſome time in ſilent diſmay, unable to return, yet fearful to proceed, when a faint light which ſeemed to iſſue from the bottom of the laſt deſcent, gleamed upon the walls, and diſcovered to them the ſecond ſtaircaſe, and at their feet

the

the pale and disfigured corpſe of a man in armour, while at a diſtance they could diſtinguiſh the figures of men. At this ſight their hearts died within them, and they gave themſelves up for loſt. They doubted not but the men whom they ſaw were the murderers; that they belonged to the Baron; and were in ſearch of ſome fugitives from the caſtle. Their only chance of concealment was to remain where they were; but the light appeared to advance, and the faces of the men to turn towards them. Winged with terror, they ſought the firſt aſcent, and flying up the ſteps, reached the door, which they endeavoured to open, that they might hide themſelves from purſuit among the intricacies of the rock; their efforts, however, were vain, for the door was faſtened by a ſpring lock, and the key was on the other ſide. Compelled to give breath to their fears, they ventured to look back, and found themſelves

ſelves again in total darkneſs; they pauſed upon the ſteps, and liſtening, all was ſilent. They reſted here a conſiderable time; no footſteps ſtartled them; no ray of light darted through the gloom; every thing ſeemed huſhed in the ſilence of death: they reſolved once more to venture forward; they gained again the bottom of the firſt deſcent, and ſhuddering as they approached the ſpot where they knew the corpſe was laid, they groped to avoid its horrid touch, when ſuddenly the light again appeared, and in the ſame place where they had firſt ſeen it. They ſtood petrified with deſpair. The light, however, moved ſlowly onward, and diſappeared in the windings of the avenue. After remaining a long time in ſilent ſuſpenſe, and finding no further obſtacle, they ventured to proceed. The light had diſcovered to them their ſituation, and the ſtaircaſe, and they now moved with greater certainty. They

reached

reached the bottom in ſafety, and without any fearful interruption; they liſtened, and again the ſilence of the place was undiſturbed. Edric knew they were now under the foſſé, their way was plain before them, and their hopes were renewed in the belief, that the light and the people they had ſeen, had taken a different direction, Edric knowing there were various paſſages branching from the main avenue which led to different openings in the rock. They now ſtepped on with alacrity, the proſpect of deliverance was near, for Edric judged they were now not far from the cavern. An abrupt turning in the paſſage confirmed at once this ſuppoſition, and extinguiſhed the hope which had attended it; for the light of a lamp burſt ſuddenly upon them, and exhibited to their ſickening eyes, the figures of four men in an attitude of menace, with their ſwords pointed ready to receive them. Alleyn drew

drew his ſword, and advanced, "We will die hardly," cried he. At the ſound of his voice, the weapons inſtantly dropped from the hands of his adverſaries, and they advanced to meet him in a tranſport of joy. Alleyn recognized with aſtoniſhment, in the faces of the three ſtrangers, his faithful friends and followers; and Edric in that of the fourth, a fellow ſoldier. The ſame purpoſe had aſſembled them all in the ſame ſpot. They quitted the cave together; and Alleyn, in the joyful experience of unexpected deliverance, reſolved never more to admit deſpair. They concluded, that the body which they had paſſed in the avenue, was that of ſome perſon who had periſhed either by hunger or by the ſword in thoſe ſubterranean labyrinths.

They marched in company till they came within a few miles of the caſtle of Athlin, when Alleyn made known his deſign

deſign of collecting his friends, and joining the clan in an attempt to releaſe the Earl; Edric, and the other ſoldier, having ſolemnly enliſted in the cauſe, they parted; Alleyn and Edric purſuing the road to the caſtle, and the others ſtriking off to a different part of the country. Alleyn and Edric had not proceeded far, when the groans of the wounded ſervants of Matilda drew them to the wood, in which the preceding dreadful ſcene had been acted. The ſurprize of Alleyn was extreme, when he diſcovered the ſervants of the Earl in this ſituation; but ſurprize ſoon yielded to a more poignant ſenſation, when he heard that Mary had been carried off by armed men. He ſcarcely waited to releaſe the ſervants, but ſeizing one of their horſes which was grazing near, inſtantly mounted, ordering the reſt to follow, and took the way which had been pointed as the courſe of the raviſhers. Fortunately it was the

right

right direction; and Alleyn and the ſoldier came up with them as they were haſtening to the mouth of that cavern, whoſe frightful aſpect had chilled the heart of Mary with a temporary death. Their endeavours to fly were vain; they were overtaken at the entrance; a ſharp conflict enſued in which one of the ruffians was wounded and fled: his comrades ſeeing the ſervants of the Earl approaching, relinquiſhed their prize, and eſcaped through the receſſes of the cave. The eyes of Alleyn were now fixed in horror on the lifeleſs form of Mary, who had remained inſenſible during the whole of the affray; he was exerting every effort for her recovery, when ſhe uncloſed her eyes, and joy once more illumined his ſoul.

During the recitital of theſe particulars, which Alleyn delivered with a modeſt brevity, the mind of Mary had ſuffered a variety of emotions ſympathetic

to

to all the viciſſitudes of his ſituation. She endeavoured to conceal from herſelf the particular intereſt ſhe felt in his adventures; but ſo unequal were her efforts to the ſtrength of her emotions, that when Alleyn related the ſcene of Dunbayne cavern, her cheek grew pale, and ſhe relapſed into a fainting fit. This circumſtance alarmed the penetration of the Counteſs; but the known weakneſs of her daughter's frame appeared a probable cauſe of the diſorder, and repreſſed her firſt apprehenſion. It gave to Alleyn a mixed delight of hope and fear, ſuch as he had never known before; for the firſt time he dared to acknowledge to his own heart that he loved, and that heart for the firſt time thrilled with the hope of being loved again.

He received from the Counteſs the warm overflowings of a heart grateful for the preſervation of her child, and from

from Mary a bluſh which ſpoke more than her tongue could utter. But the minds of all were involved in the utmoſt perplexity concerning the rank and the identity of the author of the plan, nor could they diſcover any clue which would led them through this intricate maze of wonder, to the villain who had fabricated ſo diabolical a ſcheme. Their ſuſpicions, at length, reſted upon the Baron Malcolm, and this ſuppoſition was confirmed by the appearance of the horſemen, who evidently acted only as the agents of ſuperior power. Their conjectures were indeed juſt. Malcolm was the author of the ſcheme. It had been planned, and he had given orders to his people to execute it long before the Earl fell into his hands. They had, however, found no opportunity of accompliſhing the deſign when the caſtle was ſurprized, and in the conſequent tumult of his mind,

mind, the Baron had forgot to withdraw his orders.

Alleyn expreſſed his deſign of collecting the ſmall remnant of his friends, and uniting with the clan in attempting the reſcue of the Earl. "Noble youth," exclaimed the Counteſs, unable longer to repreſs her admiration, "how can I ever repay your generous ſervices! Am I then to receive both my children at your hands? Go—my clan are now collecting for a ſecond attempt upon the walls of Dunbayne,—go! lead them to conqueſt, and reſtore to me my ſon." The languid eyes of Mary re-kindled at theſe words, ſhe glowed with the hope of claſping once more to her boſom her long loſt brother; but the ſuffuſions of hope were ſoon chaced by the chilly touch of fear, for it was Alleyn who was to lead the enterprize, and it was Alleyn who might fall in the attempt. Theſe contrary emotions un-

veiled to her at once the ſtate of her affections, and ſhe ſaw in the eye of fancy, the long train of inquietudes and ſorrows which were likely to enſue. She ſought to obliterate from her mind every remembrance of the paſt, and of the fatal knowledge which was now diſcloſed to her; but ſhe ſought in vain, for the monitor in her breaſt conſtantly preſented to her mind the image of Alleyn, adorned with thoſe brave and manly virtues which had ſo eminently diſtinguiſhed his conduct; the inſignificance of the peaſant was loſt in the nobility of the character, and every effort at forgetfulneſs was baffled.

Alleyn paſſed that night at the caſtle, and the next morning, after taking leave of the Counteſs and her daughter, to whom his eyes bade a reſpectful and mournful adieu, he departed with Edric for his father's cottage, impatient to acquaint the good old man with his ſafety,

ſafety, and to rouſe to arms his ſlumbering friends. The breath of love had now raiſed into flame thoſe ſparks of ambition which had ſo long been kindling in his breaſt; he was not only eager to avenge the cauſe of injured virtue, and to reſcue from miſery and death, the ſon of the Chief whom he had been ever taught to reverence, but he panted to avenge the inſult offered to his miſtreſs, and to atchieve ſome deed of valour worthy her admiration and her thanks.

Alleyn found his father at breakfaſt, with his niece at his ſide; his face was darkened with ſorrow, and he did not perceive Alleyn when he entered. The joy of the old man almoſt overcame him, when he beheld his ſon in ſafety, for he was the ſolace of his declining years; and Edric was welcomed with the heartineſs of an old friend.

CHAPTER IV.

MEANWHILE the Earl remained a ſolitary priſoner in the tower; uncertain fate was yet ſuſpended over him; he had, however, a magnanimity in his nature which baffled much of the cruel effort of the Baron. He had prepared his mind by habitual contemplation for the worſt, and although that worſt was death, he could now look to it even with ſerenity. Thoſe violent tranſports which had aſſailed him on ſight of the Baron, were, ſince he was no longer ſubject to his preſence, reduced within their proper limits; yet he anxiouſly avoided dwelling on the memory of his father, leſt thoſe dreadful ſenſations ſhould threaten him with returning torture. Whenever he permitted himſelf to think of the ſufferings of the Counteſs and his ſiſter, his heart melted

melted with a ſorrow that almoſt unnerved him; much he wiſhed to know how they ſupported this trial, and much he wiſhed that he could convey to them intelligence of his ſtate. He endeavoured to abſtract his mind from his ſituation, and ſought to make himſelf artificial comforts even from the barren objects around him; his chief amuſement was in obſerving the manners and cuſtoms of the birds of prey which lodged themſelves in the battlements of his tower, and the rapacity of their nature furniſhed him with too juſt a parallel to the habits of men.

As he was one day ſtanding at the grate which looked upon the caſtle, obſerving the progreſs of theſe birds, his ear caught the ſound of that ſweet lute whoſe notes had once ſaved him from deſtruction; it was accompanied by the ſame melodious voice he had formerly heard, and which now ſung

with impaſſioned tenderneſs the following air:

When firſt the vernal morn of life
Beam'd on my infant eye,
Fond I ſurvey'd the ſmiling ſcene,
Nor ſaw the tempeſt nigh.

Hope's bright illuſions touch'd my ſoul,
My young ideas led;
And Fancy's vivid tints combin'd,
And fairy proſpects ſpread.

My guileleſs heart expanded wide,
With filial fondneſs fraught;
Paternal love that heart ſupplied
With all its fondneſs ſought.

But O! the cruel quick reverſe!
Fate all I loved involv'd;
Pale Grief Hope's trembling rays diſpers'd,
And Fancy's dreams diſſolv'd.

Loſt in ſurprize, Oſbert ſtood for ſome time looking down upon an inner court, whence the ſounds ſeemed to ariſe; after a few minutes he obſerved a young

a young lady enter from that ſide on which the tower aroſe, on her arm reſted an elder one, in whoſe face might be traced the lines of decaying beauty; but it was viſible, from the melancholy which clouded her features, that the finger of affliction had there anticipated the ravages of time. She was dreſſed in the habit of a widow, and the black veil which ſhaded her forehead, and gave a fine expreſſion to her countenance, devolved upon the ground in a length of train, and heightened the natural majeſty of her figure; ſhe moved with ſlow ſteps, and was ſupported by the young lady whoſe veil half diſcloſed a countenance where beauty was touched with ſorrow and inimitable expreſſion; the elegance of her form, and the dignity of her air, proclaimed her to be of diſtinguiſhed rank. On her arm was hung that lute, whoſe melody had juſt charmed the attention of the Earl, who was now fixed in wonder at what he

beheld, that was equalled only by his admiration. They retired through a gate on the oppoſite ſide of the court, and were ſeen no more. Oſbert followed them with his eyes, which for ſome time remained fixed upon the door through which they had diſappeared, almoſt inſenſible of their departure. When he returned to himſelf, he diſcovered, as if for the firſt time, that he was in ſolitude. He conjectured that theſe ſtrangers were confined by the oppreſſive power of the Baron, and his eyes were ſuffuſed with tears of pity. When he conſidered that ſo much beauty and dignity were the unreſiſting victims of a tyrant, his heart ſwelled high with indignation, his priſon became intolerable to him, and he longed to become at once the champion of virtue, and the deliverer of oppreſſed innocence. The character of Malcolm aroſe to his mind black with accumulated guilt, and aggravated the deteſtation with

which

which he had ever contemplated it: the hateful idea nerved his ſoul with a confidence of revenge. Of the guard, who entered, he enquired concerning the ſtrangers, but could obtain no poſitive information; he came to impart other news; to prepare the Earl for death; the morrow was appointed for his execution. He received the intelligence with the firm hardihood of indignant virtue, diſdaining to ſolicit, and diſdaining to repine; and his mind yet graſped the idea of revenge. He drove from his thoughts, with precipitation, the tender ideas of his mother and ſiſter; remembrances which would ſubdue his fortitude without effecting any beneficial purpoſe. He was told of the eſcape of Alleyn; this intelligence gave him inexpreſſible pleaſure, and he knew this faithful youth would undertake to avenge his death.

When the news of Alleyn's flight

had reached the Baron, his ſoul was ſtung with rage, and he called for the guards of the dungeon; they were no where to be found; and after a long ſearch it was known that they were fled with their priſoner; the flight of the other captives was alſo diſcovered. This circumſtance exaſperated the paſſion of Malcolm to the utmoſt, and he gave orders that the life of the remaining centinel ſhould be forfeited for the treachery of his comrades, and his own negligence; when recollecting the Earl, whom in the heat of his reſentment he had forgot, his heart exulted in the opportunity he afforded of complete revenge; and in the fullneſs of joy with which he pronounced his ſentence, he retracted the condemnation of the trembling guard. The moment after he had diſpatched the meſſenger with his reſolve to the Earl, his heart faultered from its purpoſe. Such is the alternate violence of evil paſſions, that they never

never ſuffer their ſubjects to act with conſiſtency, but, torn by conflicting energies, the gratification of one propenſity is deſtruction to the enjoyment of another; and the moment in which they imagine happineſs in their graſp, is to them the moment of diſappointment. Thus it was with the Baron; his ſoul ſeemed to attain its full enjoyment in the contemplation of revenge, till the idea of Mary inflamed his heart with an oppoſite paſſion; his wiſhes had caught new ardor from diſappointment, for he had heard that Mary had been once in the power of his emiſſaries; and perhaps the pain which recoils upon the mind from every fruitleſs effort of wickedneſs, ſerved to encreaſe the energies of his deſires. He ſpurned the thought of relinquiſhing the purſuit, yet there appeared to be no method of obtaining its object, but by ſacrificing his favourite paſſion; for he had little doubt of obtaining Mary, when it ſhould

be known that he reſolved not to grant the life of the Earl upon any other ranſom. The balance of theſe paſſions hung in his mind in ſuch nice equilibrium, that it was for ſome time uncertain which would preponderate; revenge, at length, yielded to love; but he reſolved to preſerve the torture of expected death, by keeping the Earl ignorant of his reprieve till the laſt moment.

The Earl awaited death with the ſame ſtern fortitude with which he received its ſentence, and was led from the tower to the platform of the caſtle, ſilent and unmoved. He beheld the preparations for his execution, the inſtruments of death, theguards arranged in files, with an undaunted mind. The glare of externals had no longer power over his imagination. He beheld every object with indifference, but that on which his eye now reſted; it was on the murderer, who

who exhibited himſelf in all the pride of exulting conqueſt: he ſtarted at the ſight, and his ſoul ſhrunk back upon itſelf. Diſdaining, however, to appear diſconcerted, he endeavoured to reſume his dignity, when the remembrance of his mother, overwhelmed with ſorrow, ruſhed upon his mind, and quite unmanned him; the tears ſtarted in his eyes, and he ſunk ſenſeleſs on the ground.

On recovering, he found himſelf in his priſon, and he was informed that the Baron had granted him a reſpite. Malcolm miſtaking the cauſe of diſorder in the Earl, thought he had ſtretched his ſufferings to their utmoſt limits; he therefore had ordered him to be re-conveyed to the tower.

A ſcene ſo ſtriking and ſo public as that which had juſt been performed at the caſtle of Dunbayne, was a ſubject of diſcourſe

diſcourſe to the whole country; it was ſoon reported to the Counteſs with a variety of additional circumſtances, among which it was affirmed, that the Earl had been really executed. Overwhelmed with this intelligence, Matilda relapſed into her former diſorder. Sickneſs had rendered Mary leſs able to ſupport the ſhock, and to apply that comfort to the afflictions of her mother, which had once been ſo ſucceſsfully adminiſtered. The phyſician pronounced the malady of the Counteſs to be ſeated in the mind, and beyond the reach of human ſkill, when one day a letter was brought to her, the ſuperſcription of which was written in the hand of Oſbert; ſhe knew the characters, and burſting the ſeal, read that her ſon was yet alive, and did not deſpair of throwing himſelf once more at her feet. He requeſted that the remains of his clan might immediately attempt his releaſe. He deſcribed in what part of the caſtle his priſon

priſon was ſituated, and thought, that by the aſſiſtance of long ſcaling-ladders and ropes, contrived in the manner he directed, he might be able to effect his eſcape through the grate. This letter was a reviving cordial to the Counteſs and to Mary.

Alleyn was indefatigable in collecting followers for the enterprize he had engaged in. On receiving intelligence of the ſafety of the Earl, he viſited the clan, and was ſtrenuous in exhorting them to immediate action. They required little incitement to a cauſe in which every heart was ſo much intereſted, and for which every hand was already buſied in preparation. Theſe preparations were at length completed; Alleyn, at the head of his party, joined the aſſembled clan. The Counteſs for a ſecond time beheld from the ramparts the departure of her people upon the ſame hazardous enterprize; the preſent

ſcene

ſcene revived in her mind a ſad remembrance of the paſt; the ſame tender fears, and the ſame prayers for ſucceſs ſhe now gave to their departure; and when they faded in diſtance from her ſight, ſhe returned into the caſtle diſſolved in tears. The heart of Mary was torn by a complex ſorrow, and incapable of longer concealing from herſelf the intereſt ſhe took in the departure of Alleyn, her agitation became more apparent. The Counteſs in vain endeavoured to compoſe her mind. Mary, affected by her tender concern, and prompted by the natural ingenuouſneſs of her diſpoſition, longed to make her the confidant of her weakneſs, if weakneſs that can be termed which ariſes from gratitude, and from the admiration of great and generous qualities; but delicacy and timidity arreſted the half-formed ſentence, and cloſed her lips in ſilence. Her health gradually declined under the ſecret agitation of her

her mind; her phyſician knew her diſorder to originate in ſuppreſſed ſorrow, and adviſed, as the beſt cordial, a confidential friend. Matilda now perceived the cauſe of her grief; her former paſſing obſervations recurred to her memory, and juſtified her diſcernment. She ſtrove by every ſoothing effort to win her to her confidence. Mary, oppreſſed by the idea of ungenerous concealment, reſolved at length to unveil her heart to a mother ſo tender of her happineſs. She told her all her ſentiments. The Counteſs ſuffered a diſtreſs almoſt equal to that of her daughter; her affectionate heart ſwelled with equal wiſhes for her happineſs; ſhe admired with warmeſt gratitude the noble and aſpiring virtues of the young Highlander; but the proud nobility of her ſoul repelled with quick vivacity every idea of union with a youth of ſuch ignoble birth: ſhe regarded the preſent attachment as the paſſing impreſſion of youthful fancy,

and

and believed that gentle reaſoning, aided by time and endeavour, would conquer the enthuſiaſm of love. Mary liſtened with attention to the reaſonings of the Counteſs; her judgment acknowledged their juſtneſs, while her heart regretted their force. She reſolved, however, to overcome an attachment which would produce ſo much diſtreſs to her family and to herſelf. Notwithſtanding her endeavours to exclude Alleyn from her thoughts, the generous and heroic qualities of his mind burſt upon her memory in all their ſplendor, ſhe could not but be conſcious that he loved her; ſhe ſaw the ſtruggles of his ſoul, and the delicacy of his paſſion, which made him ever retire in the moſt profound and reſpectful ſilence from its object. She ſolicited her mother to aſſiſt in expelling the deſtructive image from her mind. The Counteſs exerted every effort to amuſe her to forgetfulneſs; every hour, except thoſe which were given to exerciſes

exerciſes neceſſary for her health, was devoted to the cultivation of her mind, and the improvement of her various accompliſhments. Theſe endeavours were not unſucceſsful; the Counteſs with joy obſerved the returning health and tranquillity of her daughter; and Mary almoſt believed ſhe had taught herſelf to forget. Theſe engagements ſerved alſo to beguile the tedious moments which muſt intervene, ere news could arrive from Alleyn concerning the probable ſucceſs of the enterprize.

Miſery yet dwelt in the caſtle of Dunbayne; for there the virtues were captive, while the vices reigned deſpotic. The mind of the Baron, ardent and reſtleſs, knew no peace: torn by conflicting paſſions, he was himſelf the victim of their power.

The Earl knew that his life hung upon the caprice of a tyrant; his mind was

was nerved for the worſt; yet the letter which the compaſſion of one of his guards, at the riſque of his life, had undertaken to convey to the Counteſs, afforded him a faint hope that his people might yet effect his eſcape. In this expectation, he ſpent hour after hour at his grate, wiſhing, with trembling anxiety, to behold his clan advancing over the diſtant hills. Theſe hills became at length, in a ſituation ſo barren of real comforts, a ſource of ideal pleaſure to him. He was always at the grate, and often, in the fine evenings of ſummer, ſaw the ladies, whoſe appearance had ſo ſtrongly excited his admiration and pity, walk on a terrace below the tower. One very fine evening, under the pleaſing impreſſions of hope for himſelf, and compaſſion for them, his ſufferings for a time loſt their acuteneſs. He longed to awaken their ſympathy, and make known to them that they had a fellow-priſoner. The parting ſun trembled

on

on the tops of the mountains, and a ſofter ſhade fell upon the diſtant land-ſcape. The ſweet tranquillity of even-ing threw an air of tender melancholy over his mind: his ſorrows for a while were huſhed; and under the enthuſiaſm of the hour, he compoſed the following ſtanzas, which, having committed them to paper, he the next evening dropp'd upon the terrace.

SONNET.

Hail! to the hallow'd hill, the circling lawn,
The breezy upland, and the mountain ſtream!
The laſt tall pine that earlieſt meets the dawn,
And gliſtens lateſt to the weſtern gleam!

Hail! every diſtant hill, and downland plain!
Your dew-hid beauties Fancy oft unveils;
What time to ſhepherd's reed, or Poet's ſtrain,
Sorrowing my heart its deſtin'd woe bewails.

Bleſt are the fairy hour, the twilight ſhade
Of Ev'ning, wand'ring thro' her woodlands dear;
Sweet the ſtill ſound that ſteals along the glade;
'Tis Fancy wafts it, and her vot'ries hear.

'Tis

'Tis Fancy wafts it!—and how ſweet the ſound!
I hear it now the diſtant hills uplong;
While fairy echos from their dells around,
And woods, and wilds, the feeble notes prolong!

He had the pleaſure to obſerve that the paper was taken up by the ladies, who immediately retired into the caſtle.

CHAPTER

CHAPTER V.

ONE morning early, the Earl diſcerned a martial band emerging from the verge of the horizon; his heart welcomed his hopes, which were ſoon confirmed into certainty. It was his faithful people, led on by Alleyn. It was their deſign to ſurround and attack the caſtle; and though their numbers gave them but little hopes of conqueſt, they yet believed that, in the tumult of the engagement, they might procure the deliverance of the Earl. With this view they advanced to the walls. The centinels had deſcried them at diſtance; the alarm was given; the trumpets ſounded, and the walls of the caſtle were filled with men. The Baron was preſent, and directed the preparations. The ſecret purpoſe of his ſoul was fixed. The clan ſurrounded the foſſé, into which

which they threw bundles of faggots, and gave the ſignal of attack. Scaling ladders were thrown up to the window of the tower. The Earl, invigorated with hope and joy, had by the force of his arm, almoſt wrenched from its faſtening, one of the iron bars of the grate; his foot was lifted to the ſtanchion, ready to aid him in eſcaping through the opening, when he was ſeized by the guards of the Baron, and conveyed precipitately from the priſon. He was led, indignant and deſperate, to the lofty ramparts of the caſtle, from whence he beheld Alleyn and his clan, whoſe eager eyes were once more bleſſed with the ſight of their Chief;—they were bleſſed but for a moment; they beheld their Lord in chains, ſurrounded with guards, and with the inſtruments of death. Animated, however, with a laſt hope, they renewed the attack with redoubled fury, when the trumpets of the Baron ſounded a parley, and they ſuſpended their arms.

The

The Baron appeared on the ramparts; Alleyn advanced to hear him. "The moment of attack," cried the Baron, "is the moment of death to your Chief. If you wiſh to preſerve his life, deſiſt from the aſſault, and depart in peace; and bear this meſſage to the Counteſs, your miſtreſs:—the Baron Malcolm will accept no other ranſom for the life and the liberty of the Earl, than her beauteous daughter, whom he now ſues to become his wife. If ſhe accedes to theſe terms, the Earl is inſtantly liberated,—if ſhe refuſes,—he dies." The emotions of the Earl, and of Alleyn, on hearing theſe words, were inexpreſſible. The Earl ſpurned, with haughty virtue, the baſe conceſſion. "Give me death," cried he with loud impatience; "the houſe of Athlin ſhall not be diſhonoured by alliance with a murderer: renew the attack, my brave people; ſince you cannot ſave the life, revenge the death of your Chief; he dies contented, ſince his

death preſerves his family from diſhonour." The guards inſtantly ſurrounded the Earl.

Alleyn, whoſe heart, torn by contending emotions, was yet true to the impulſe of honour, on obſerving this, inſtantly threw down his arms, refuſing to obey the commands of the Earl; a hoſtage for whoſe life he demanded, while he haſtened to the caſtle of Athlin with the conditions of the Baron. The clan, following the example of Alleyn, reſted on their arms, while a few prepared to depart with him on the embaſſy. In vain were the remonſtrances and the commands of the Earl; his people loved him too well to obey them, and his heart was filled with anguiſh when he ſaw Alleyn depart from the walls.

The ſituation of Alleyn was highly pitiable; all the firm virtues of his ſoul were

were called upon to ſupport it. He was commiſſioned on an embaſſy, the alternate conditions of which would bring miſery on the woman he adored, or death to the friend whom he loved.

When the arrival of Alleyn was announced to the Counteſs, impatient joy thrilled in her boſom; for ſhe had no doubt that he brought offers of accommodation; and no ranſom was preſented to her imagination, which ſhe would not willingly give for the reſtoration of her ſon. At the ſound of Alleyn's voice, thoſe tumults which had began to ſubſide in the heart of Mary, were again revived, and ſhe awoke to the mournful certainty of hopeleſs endeavour. Yet ſhe could not repreſs a ſtrong emotion of joy on again beholding him. The ſoft bluſh of her cheek ſhewed the colours of her mind, while, in endeavouring to ſhade her feelings, ſhe impelled them into ſtronger light.

The agitations of Alleyn almoſt ſubdued his ſtrength, when he entered the preſence of the Counteſs; and his viſage, on which was impreſſed deep diſtreſs, and the paleneſs of fear, betrayed the inward workings of his ſoul. Matilda was inſtantly ſeized with apprehenſion for the ſafety of her ſon, and in a tremulous voice, enquired his fate. Alleyn told her he was well, proceeding with tender caution to acquaint her with the buſineſs of his embaſſy, and with the ſcene to which he had lately been witneſs. The ſentence of the Baron fell like the ſtroke of death upon the heart of Mary, who fainted at the words. Alleyn flew to ſupport her. In endeavouring to revive her daughter, the Counteſs was diverted for a time from the anguiſh which this intelligence muſt naturally impart. It was long ere Mary returned to life, and ſhe returned only to a ſenſe of wretchedneſs. The critical ſituation of Matilda

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can ſcarcely be felt in its full extent. Torn by the conflict of oppoſite intereſts, her brain was the ſeat of tumult, and wild diſmay. Which ever way ſhe looked, deſtruction cloſed the view. The murderer of the huſband, now ſought to murder the happineſs of the daughter. On the ſentence of the mother hung the final fate of the ſon. In rejecting theſe terms, ſhe would give him inſtant death; in accepting them, her conduct would be repugnant to the feelings of indignant virtue, and to the tender injured memory of her murdered Lord. She would deſtroy for ever the peace of her daughter, and the honour of her houſe. To effect his deliverance by force of arms was utterly impracticable, ſince the Baron had declared, that "the moment of attack ſhould be the moment of death to the Earl." Honour, humanity, parental tenderneſs, bade her ſave her ſon; yet, by a ſtrange contrariety of intereſts, the

ſame virtues pleaded with a voice equal-ly powerful, for the reverſe of the ſentence. Hitherto hope had ſtill illumined her mind with a diſtant ray; ſhe now found herſelf ſuddenly involved in the darkneſs of deſpair, whoſe glooms were interrupted only by the gleams of horror which aroſe from the altar, on which was to be ſacrificed one of her beloved children. Her mind ſhrunk from the idea of uniting her daughter to the murderer of her father. The ferocious character of Malcolm was alone ſufficient to blight for ever the happineſs of the woman whoſe fate ſhould be connected with his. To give to the murderer the child of the murdered was a thought too horrid to reſt upon. The Counteſs rejected with force the Baron's offer of exchange, when the bleeding figure of her beloved ſon, pale and convulſed in death, ſtarted on her imagination, and ſtretched her brain almoſt to frenzy.

Meanwhile

Meanwhile Mary ſuffered a conflict equally dreadful. Nature had beſtowed on her a heart ſuſceptible of all the fine emotions of delicate paſſion; a heart which vibrated in uniſon with the ſweeteſt feelings of humanity; a mind, quick in perceiving the niceſt lines of moral rectitude, and ſtrenuous in endeavouring to act up to its perceptions. Theſe gifts were unneceſſary to make her ſenſible of the wretchedneſs of her preſent ſituation; of which a common mind would have felt the miſery; they ſerved, however, to ſharpen the points of affliction, to encreaſe their force, and to diſcloſe, in ſtronger light, the various horrors of her ſituation. Fraternal love and pity called loudly upon her to reſign herſelf into the power of the man whom, from the earlieſt dawn of perception, ſhe had contemplated with trembling averſion and horror. The memory of her murdered parent, every feeling dear to virtue, the tremulous, but forceful

voice of love awakened her heart, and each oppoſed, with wild impetuoſity, every other ſentiment. Her ſoul ſhrunk back with terror from the idea of union with the Baron. Could ſhe bear to receive, in marriage, that hand which was ſtained with the blood of her father?—The polluted touch would freeze her heart in horror!—could ſhe bear to paſs her life with the man, who had for ever blaſted the ſmiling days of him who gave her being?—With the man who would ſtand before her eyes a perpetual monument of miſery to herſelf, and of diſhonour to her family? whoſe chilling aſpect would repel every amiable and generous affection, and ſtrike them back upon her heart only to wound it? To cheriſh the love of the noble virtues, would be to cheriſh the remembrance of her dead father, and of her living lover. How wretched muſt be her ſituation, when to obliterate from her memory the image of virtue, could alone afford her

her a chance of obtaining a horrid tranquillity; virtue which is ſo dear to the human heart, that when her form forſakes us, we purſue her ſhadow. Whereever in ſearch of comfort ſhe directed her aching ſight, Miſery's haggard countenance obtruded on her view. Here ſhe beheld herſelf entombed in the arms of the murderer;—there, the ſpectacle of her beloved brother, encircled with chains, and awaiting the ſtroke of death, aroſe to her imagination; the ſcene was too affecting; fancy gave her the horrors of reality. The reflection, that through her he ſuffered, that ſhe yet might ſave him from deſtruction, broke with irreſiſtible force upon her mind, and inſtantly bore away every oppoſing feeling. She reſolved, that ſince ſhe muſt be wretched, ſhe would be nobly wretched; ſince miſery demanded one ſacrifice, ſhe would devote herſelf the victim.

With theſe thoughts, ſhe entered the apartment of the Counteſs, whoſe concurrence was neceſſary to ratify her reſolves, and, having declared them, awaited in trembling expectation her deciſion. Matilda had ſuffered a diſtraction of mind, which the nature of no former trial had occaſioned her. On the unfortunate death of a huſband tenderly beloved, ſhe had ſuffered all the ſorrow which tenderneſs, and all the ſhock which the manner of his death could occaſion. The event, however, ſhocking as it was, did not hang upon circumſtances over which ſhe had an influence; it was decided by an higher power;—it was decided, and never could be recalled; ſhe had there no dreadful choice of horrors, no evil ratified by her own voice, to taint with deadly recollections her declining days. This choice, though forced upon her by the power of a tyrant, ſhe would ſtill conſider as in part her own; and the thought

that

that ſhe was compelled to doom to deſtruction one of her children, harrowed up her ſoul almoſt to frenzy.

Her mind, at length exhauſted with exceſs of feeling, was now fallen into a ſtate of cold and ſilent deſpair; ſhe became inſenſible to the objects around her, almoſt to the ſenſe of her own ſufferings, and the voice, and the propoſal of her daughter, ſcarcely awakened her powers of perception. "He ſhall live," ſaid Mary, in a voice broken and tender; "He ſhall live, I am ready to become the ſacrifice." Tears prevented her proceeding. At the word "live," the Counteſs raiſed her eyes, and threw round her a look of wildneſs, which ſettling on the features of Mary, ſoftened into an expreſſion of ineffable tenderneſs, ſhe waved her head, and turned to the window. A few tears bedewed her cheek; they fell like the drops of Heaven upon the withered plant, reviving

and expanding its dying foliage; they were the firſt her eyes had known ſince the fatal news had reached her. Recovering herſelf a little, ſhe ſent for Alleyn, who was ſtill in the caſtle. She wiſhed to conſult with him, whether there was not yet a poſſibility of effecting the eſcape of the Earl. In afflictions of whatever degree, where death has not already fixed the events in certainty, the mind ſhoots almoſt beyond the ſphere of poſſibility in ſearch of hope, and ſeldom relinquiſhes the fond illuſion, till the ſtroke of reality diſſolves the enchantment. Thus it was with Matilda; after the grief produced by the firſt ſtroke of this diſaſter was ſomewhat abated, ſhe was inclined to think that her ſituation might not prove ſo deſperate as ſhe imagined; and her heart was warmed by a remote hope, that there might yet be deviſed ſome method of procuring the eſcape of the Earl. Alleyn came; he came in the trembling

trembling expectation of receiving the deciſion of the Counteſs, and in the intention of offering to engage in any enterprize, however hazardous, for the enlargement of the Earl. He repelled, with inſtant force, every idea of Mary's becoming the wife of Malcolm; the thought was too full of agony to be endured, and he threw the ſenſation from his heart as a poiſon which would deſtroy the pulſe of life. To preſerve Mary from a miſery ſo exquiſite, and to ſave the life of the Earl, he was willing to encounter any hazard; to meet death itſelf as an evil which appeared leſs dreadful than either of the former. He came prepared with this reſolution, and it ſerved to ſupport that fortitude which affliction had diſturbed, though it could not ſubdue. When he came again to the Counteſs, his diſtreſs was heightened by the ſcene before him; he beheld her leaning on a ſofa, pale and ſilent; her unconſcious eyes were fixed on an oppoſite

polite window; her countenance was touched with a wildneſs expreſſive of the diſorder of her mind, and ſhe remained for ſome time inſenſible of his approach. Such is the fluctuation of a mind overcome by diſtreſs, that if for a moment a ray of hope chears its darkneſs, it vaniſhes at the touch of recollection. Mary was ſtanding near the Counteſs, whoſe hand ſhe held to her boſom. Her preſent ſorrow had heightened the natural penſiveneſs of her countenance, and ſhaded her features with an intereſting languor, more enchanting than the vivacity of blooming health; her eyes ſought to avoid Alleyn, as an object dangerous to the reſolution ſhe had formed. Matilda remained abſorbed in thought. Mary wiſhed to repeat the purpoſe of her ſoul, but her voice trembled, and the half-formed ſentence died away on her lips. Alleyn enquired the commands of the Counteſs. "I am ready," ſaid Mary, at length, in a low and

and tremulous voice, "to give myſelf the victim to the Baron's revenge.—I will ſave my brother." At theſe words, the heart of Alleyn grew cold. Mary, overcome by the effort which they had occaſioned her, ſcarcely finiſhed the ſentence; her nerves ſhook, a miſt fell over her eye, and ſhe ſunk on the ſofa by which ſhe had ſtood. Alleyn hung over the couch in ſilent agony, watching her return to life. By the aſſiſtance of thoſe about her, ſhe ſoon revived. Alleyn, in the joy which he felt at her recovery, forgot for a moment his ſituation, and preſſed with ardor her hand to his boſom. Mary, whoſe ſenſes were yet ſcarcely recollected, yielded unconſciouſly to the ſoftneſs of her heart, and betrayed its ſituation by a ſmile ſo tender, as to thrill the breaſt of Alleyn with the ſweet certainty of being loved. Hitherto his paſſion had been chilled by the deſpair which the vaſt ſuperiority of her birth occaſioned, and by the modeſty

deſty which forbade him to imagine that he had merit ſufficient to arreſt the eye of the accompliſhed Mary. Perhaps, too, the diffidence natural to genuine love, might contribute to deceive him. It was not till this moment, that he experienced that certainty which awakened in his heart a ſenſe of delight hitherto unknown to him. For a moment he forgot the diſtreſſes of the caſtle, and his own ſituation; every idea faded from his mind, but the one he had ſo lately acquired; and in that moment he ſeemed to taſte perfect felicity. Recollection, however, with all its train of black dependancies ſoon returned, and plunged him in a miſery as poignant as the joy from which he was now precipitated.

The Counteſs was now ſufficiently compoſed to enter on the ſubject neareſt her heart. Alleyn caught, with eagerneſs, her mention of attempting the deliverance

deliverance of the Earl, for the poſſibility of accompliſhing which, he declared himſelf willing to encounter any danger: he ſeconded ſo warmly the deſign, and ſpoke with ſuch flattering probability of ſucceſs, that the ſpirits of Matilda began once more to revive; yet ſhe trembled to encourage hopes which hung on ſuch perilous uncertainty. It was agreed, that Alleyn ſhould conſult with the moſt able and truſty of the clan, whom age or infirmity had detained from battle, on the means moſt likely to enſure ſucceſs, and then proceed immediately on the expedition: having firſt delivered to the Baron a meſſage from the Counteſs, requiring time for deliberation upon a choice ſo important, and importing that an anſwer ſhould be returned at the expiration of a fortnight.

Alleyn accordingly aſſembled thoſe whom he judged moſt worthy of the council:

council: various ſchemes were propoſed, none of which appeared likely to ſucceed; when it was recollected that the Earl might poſſibly have been removed from the tower to ſome new place of confinement, which it would be neceſſary firſt to diſcover, that the plan might be adapted to the ſituation. It was therefore concluded to ſuſpend further conſultation till Alleyn had obtained the requiſite information; and that in the mean time he ſhould deliver to Malcolm the meſſage of the Counteſs: for theſe purpoſes Alleyn immediately ſet out for the caſtle.

CHAP-

CHAPTER. VI.

THE caſtle of Dunbayne was ſtill the ſcene of triumph, and of wretchedneſs. Malcolm, exulting in his ſcheme, already beheld Mary at his feet, and the Earl retiring in an anguiſh more poignant than that of death. He was ſurprized that his invention had not before ſupplied him with this means of torture: for the firſt time he welcomed love, as the inſtrument of his revenge; and the charms of Mary were heightened to his imagination by the ardent colours of this paſſion. He was confirmed in his reſolves, never to relinquiſh the Earl, but on the conditions he had offered; and thus for ever would he preſerve the houſe of Athlin a monument of his triumph.

Oſbert, for greater ſecurity, was conveyed from the tower into a more central

trical part of the caſtle, to an apartment ſpacious but gloomy, whoſe gothic windows partly excluding light, threw a ſolemnity around, which chilled the heart almoſt to horror. He heeded not this; his heart was occupied with horrors of its own. He was now involved in a miſery more intricate, and more dreadful, than his imagination had yet painted. To die, was to him, who had ſo long contemplated the near approach of death, a familiar and tranſient evil; but to ſee, even in idea, his family involved in infamy, and in union with the murderer, was the ſtroke which pierced his heart to its center. He feared that the cruel tenderneſs of the mother would tempt Matilda to accept the offers of the Baron; and he ſcarcely doubted, that the noble Mary would reſign herſelf the price of his life. He would have written to the Counteſs to have forbidden her acceptance of the terms, and to have declared his fixed reſolution

reſolution to die, but that he had no means of conveying to her a letter; the ſoldier who had ſo generouſly undertaken the conveyance of his former one, having ſoon after diſappeared from his ſtation. The manly fortitude which had ſupported him through his former trials, did not deſert him in this hour of darkneſs; habituated ſo long to ſtruggle with oppoſing feelings, he had acquired the art of managing them; his mind attained a confidence in its powers; reſiſtance ſerved only to increaſe its ſtrength, and to confirm the magnanimity of its nature.

Alleyn had now joined the clan, and was ardent in purſuit of the neceſſary intelligence. He learned that the Earl had been removed from the tower, but in what part of the caſtle he was now confined he could not diſcover; on this point all was vague conjecture. That he was alive, was only judged from the policy

policy of the Baron, whoſe ardent paſſion for Mary was now well underſtood. Alleyn employed every ſtratagem his invention could ſuggeſt, to diſcover the priſon of the Earl, but without ſucceſs: at length compelled to deliver to Malcolm, the meſſage of the Counteſs, he demanded, as a preliminary, that the Earl ſhould be ſhewn to his people from the ramparts, that they might be certain he was ſtill alive. Alleyn hoped that his appearance would lead to a diſcovery of the place of his impriſonment, purpoſing to obſerve narrowly the way by which he ſhould retire.

The Earl appeared in ſafety on the ramparts, amid the ſhouts and acclamations of his people; the Baron, frowning defiance, was ſeen at his ſide. Alleyn advanced to the walls, and delivered the meſſage of Matilda. Oſbert ſtarted at its purpoſe; he foreſaw that deliberation

deliberation portended compliance:—ſtung with the thought, he ſwore aloud he never would ſurvive the infamy of the conceſſion; and addreſſing himſelf to Alleyn, commanded him inſtantly to return to the Counteſs, and bid her ſpurn the baſe compliance, as ſhe feared to ſacrifice both her children to the murderer of their father. At theſe words, a ſmile of haughty triumph marked the features of the Baron, and he turned from Oſbert in ſilent exultation. The Earl was led off by the guards. Alleyn endeavoured in vain to mark the way they took; the lofty walls ſoon concealed them from his view.

Alleyn now experienced how ſtrenuouſly a vigorous mind protects its favourite hope; wayward circumſtances may ſhock, diſappointment may check it; but it riſes ſuperior to oppoſition, and traverſes the ſphere of poſſibility to accompliſh its purpoſe. Alleyn did not yet

yet deſpair, but he was perplexed in what manner to proceed.

In his way from the ramparts, Oſbert was ſurprized by the appearance of two ladies at a window near which he paſſed: the agitation of his mind did not prevent his recognizing them as the ſame he had obſerved from the grates of the tower, with ſuch lively admiration, and who had excited in his mind ſo much pity and curioſity. In the midſt of his diſtreſs, his thoughts had often dwelt on the ſweet graces of the younger, and he had ſighed to obtain the ſtory of her ſorrows; for the melancholy which hung upon her features proclaimed her to be unfortunate. They now ſtood obſerving Oſbert as he paſſed, and their eyes expreſſed the pity which his ſituation inſpired. He gazed earneſtly and mournfully upon them, and when he entered his priſon, again enquired concerning them, but the ſame

inflexible ſilence was preſerved on the ſubject.

As the Earl ſat one day muſing in his priſon, his eyes unvoluntarily fixed upon a pannel in the oppoſite wainſcot; —he obſerved that it was differently formed from the reſt, and that its projection was ſomewhat greater; a hope ſtarted into his mind, and he quitted his ſeat to examine it. He perceived that it was ſurrounded by a ſmall crack, and on puſhing it with his hands it ſhook under them. Certain that it was ſomething more than a pannel, he exerted all his ſtrength againſt it, but without producing any new effect. Having tried various means to move it without ſucceſs, he gave up the experiment, and returned to his ſeat melancholy and diſappointed. Several days paſſed without any further notice being taken of the wainſcot; unwilling, however, to relinquiſh a laſt hope, he returned to

the examination, when, in endeavouring to remove the pannel, his foot accidentally hit againſt one corner, and it ſuddenly flew open. It had been contrived that a ſpring which was concealed within, and which faſtened the partition, ſhould receive its impulſe from the preſſure of a certain part of the pannel, which was now touched by the foot of the Earl. His joy on the diſcovery cannot be expreſſed. An apartment wide and forlorn, like that which formed his priſon, now lay before him; the windows, which were high and arched, were decorated with painted glaſs; the floor was paved with marble; and it ſeemed to be the deſerted remains of a place of worſhip. Oſbert traverſed, with heſitating ſteps, its dreary length, towards a pair of folding doors, large and of oak, which cloſed the apartment: theſe he opened; a gallery, gloomy and vaſt, appeared beyond; the windows, which were in the ſame ſtyle of Gothic architecture

architecture with the former, were ſhaded by thick ivy that almoſt excluded the light. Oſbert ſtood at the entrance, uncertain whether to proceed; he liſtened, but heard no footſtep in his priſon, and determined to go on. The gallery terminated on the left in a large winding ſtair-caſe, old and apparently neglected, which led to a hall below; on the right was a door, low, and rather obſcure. Oſbert, apprehenſive of diſcovery, paſſed the ſtair-caſe, and opened the door, when a ſuite of noble apartments, magnificently furniſhed, was diſcloſed to his wondering eyes. He proceeded onward without perceiving any perſon, but having paſſed the ſecond room, heard the faint ſobs of a perſon weeping; he ſtood for a moment, undetermined whether to proceed; but an irreſiſtible curioſity impelled him forward, and he entered an apartment, in which were ſeated the beautiful ſtrangers, whoſe appearance

had ſo much intereſted his feelings. The elder of the ladies was diſſolved in tears, and a caſket and ſome papers lay open on a table beſide her. The younger was ſo intent upon a drawing, which ſhe ſeemed to be finiſhing, as not to obſerve the entrance of the Earl. The elder lady, on perceiving him, aroſe in ſome confuſion, and the ſurprize in her eyes ſeemed to demand an explanation of ſo unaccountable a viſit. The Earl, ſurpriſed at what he beheld, ſtepped back with an intention of retiring; but recollecting that the intruſion demanded an apology, he returned. The grace with which he excuſed himſelf, confirmed the impreſſion which his figure had already made on the mind of Laura, which was the name of the younger lady; who on looking up, diſcovered a countenance in which dignity and ſweetneſs were happily blended. She appeared to be about twenty, her perſon was of the middle ſtature, extremely delicate,

delicate, and very elegantly formed. The bloom of her youth was ſhaded by a ſoft and penſive melancholy, which communicated an expreſſion to her fine blue eyes, extremely intereſting. Her features were partly concealed by the beautiful luxuriance of her auburn hair, which curling round her face, deſcended in treſſes on her boſom; every feminine grace played around her; and the ſimple dignity of her air declared the purity and the nobility of her mind. On perceiving the Earl, a faint bluſh animated her cheek, and ſhe involuntarily quitted the drawing upon which ſhe had been engaged.

If the former imperfect view he had caught of Laura had given an impreſſion to the heart of Oſbert, it now received a ſtronger character, from the opportunity afforded him of contemplating her beauty. He concluded that the Baron, attracted by her charms, had

entrapped her into his power, and detained her in the caſtle an unwilling priſoner. In this conjecture he was confirmed by the mournful caſt of her countenance, and by the myſtery which appeared to furround her. Fired by this idea, he melted in compaſſion for her ſufferings; which compaſſion was tinctured and encreaſed by the paſſion which now glowed in his heart. At that moment he forgot the danger of his preſent ſituation; he forgot even that he was a priſoner; and awake only to the wiſh of alleviating her ſorrows, he rejected cold and uſeleſs delicacy, and reſolved, if poſſible, to learn the cauſe of her misfortunes. Addreſſing himſelf to the Baroneſs, "if, Madam," ſaid he, "I could by any means ſoften the affliction which I cannot affect not to perceive, and which has ſo warmly intereſted my feelings, I ſhould regard this as one of the moſt happy moments of my life; a life marked, alas! too ſtrongly

ly with miſery! but miſery has not been uſeleſs, ſince it has taught me ſympathy." The Baroneſs was no ſtranger to the character and the misfortunes of the Earl. Herſelf the victim of oppreſſion, ſhe knew how to commiſerate the ſufferings of others. She had ever felt a tender compaſſion for the misfortunes of Oſbert, and did not now with-hold ſincere expreſſions of ſympathy, and of gratitude, for the intereſt which he felt in her ſorrow. She expreſſed her ſurprize at ſeeing him thus at liberty; but obſerving the chains which encircled his hands, ſhe ſhuddered, and gueſſed a part of the truth. He explained to her the diſcovery of the pannel, by which circumſtance he had found his way into that apartment. The idea of aiding him to eſcape, ruſhed upon the mind of the Baroneſs, but was repreſſed by the conſideration of her own confined ſituation; and ſhe was compelled, with mournful reluctance, to reſign that thought which

reverence for the character of the late Earl, and compaſſion for the misfortunes of the preſent, had inſpired. She lamented her inability to aſſiſt him, and informed him that herſelf and her daughter were alike priſoners with himſelf; that the walls of the caſtle were the limits of their liberty; and that they had ſuffered the preſſure of tyranny for fifteen years. The Earl expreſſed the indignation which he felt at this recital, and ſolicited the Baroneſs to confide in his integrity; and, if the relation would not be too painful to her, to honour him ſo far as to acquaint him by what cruel means ſhe fell into the power of Malcolm. The Baroneſs, apprehenſive for his ſafety, reminded him of the riſk of diſcovery by a longer abſence from his priſon; and, thanking him again for the intereſt he took in her ſufferings, aſſured him of her warmeſt wiſhes for his deliverance, and that if an opportunity ever offered, ſhe would

acquaint

acquaint him with the ſad particulars of her ſtory. The eyes of Oſbert made known that gratitude which it was difficult for his tongue to utter. Tremuloufly he ſolicited the conſolation of ſometimes re-viſiting the apartments of the Baroneſs; a permiſſion which would give him ſome intervals of comfort amid the many hours of torment to which he was condemned. The Baroneſs, in compaſſion to his ſufferings, granted the requeſt. The Earl departed, gazing on Laura with eyes of mournful tenderneſs; yet he was pleaſed with what had paſſed, and retired to his priſon in one of thoſe peaceful intervals which are known even to the wretched. He found all quiet, and cloſing the pannel in ſafety, ſat down to conſider the paſt, and anticipate the future. He was flattered with hopes, that the diſcovery of the pannel might aid him to eſcape; the glooms of deſpondence which had lately enveloped his

mind, gradually diſappeared, and joy once more illumined his proſpects; but it was the ſunſhine of an April morn, deceitful and momentary. He recollected that the caſtle was beſet with guards, whoſe vigilance was inſured by the ſeverity of the Baron; he remembered that the ſtrangers, who had taken ſo kind an intereſt in his fate, were priſoners like himſelf; and that he had no generous ſoldier to teach him the ſecret windings of the caſtle, and to accompany him in flight. His imagination was haunted by the image of Laura; vainly he ſtrove to diſguiſe from himſelf the truth; his heart conſtantly belied the ſophiſtry of his reaſonings. Unwarily he had drank the draught of love, and he was compelled to acknowledge the fatal indiſcretion. He could not, however, reſolve to throw from his heart the delicious poiſon; he could not reſolve to ſee her no more. The painful apprehenſion for his ſafety, which

which his forbearing to renew the viſit he had ſo earneſtly ſolicited, would occaſion the Baroneſs; the apparent diſreſpect it would convey; the ardent curioſity with which he longed to obtain the hiſtory of her misfortunes; the lively intereſt he felt in learning the ſituation of Laura, with reſpect to the Baron; and the hope,—the wild hope, with which he deluded his reaſon, that he might be able to aſſiſt them, determined him to repeat the viſit. Under theſe illuſions, the motive which principally impelled him to the interview was concealed.

In the mean time Alleyn had returned to the caſtle of Athlin with the reſolutions of the Earl; whoſe reſolves ſerved only to aggravate the diſtreſs of its fair inhabitants. Alleyn, however, unwilling to cruſh a laſt hope, tenderly concealed from them the circumſtance of the Earl's removal from the tower;

ſilently and almoſt hopeleſsly meditating to diſcover his priſon; and adminiſtered that comfort to the Counteſs and to Mary, which his own expectation would not ſuffer him to participate. He retired in haſte to the veterans whom he had before aſſembled, and acquainted them with the removal of the Earl; which circumſtance muſt for the preſent ſuſpend their conſultations. He left them, therefore, and inſtantly returned to the clan: there to proſecute his enquiries. Every poſſible exertion was made to obtain the neceſſary intelligence, but without ſucceſs. The moment in which the Baron would demand the anſwer of the Counteſs, was now faſt approaching, and every heart ſunk in deſpair, when one night the centinels of the camp were alarmed by the approach of men, who hailed them in unknown voices; fearful of ſurprize, they ſurrounded the ſtrangers, and led them to Alleyn; to whom they related,

that

that they fled from the capricious tyranny of Malcolm, and ſought refuge in the camp of his enemy; whoſe misfortunes they bewailed, and in whoſe cauſe they enliſted. Rejoiced at the circumſtance, yet doubtful of its truth, Alleyn interrogated the ſoldiers concerning the priſon of the Earl. From them he learned, that Oſbert was confined in a part of the caſtle extremely difficult of acceſs; and that any plan of eſcape muſt be utterly impracticable without the aſſiſtance of one well acquainted with the various intricacies of the pile. An opportunity of ſucceſs was now preſented, with which the moſt ſanguine hopes of Alleyn had never flattered him. He received from the ſoldiers ſtrong aſſurances of aſſiſtance; from them, likewiſe, he learned, that diſcontent reigned among the people of the Baron; who, impatient of the yoke of tyranny, only waited a favourable opportunity to throw it off, and reſume

the rights of nature. That the vigilant ſuſpicions of Malcolm excited him to puniſh with the harſheſt ſeverity every appearance of inattention; that being condemned to ſuffer a very heavy puniſhment for a ſlight offence, they had eluded the impending miſery, and the future oppreſſion of their Chief, by deſertion.

Alleyn immediately convened a council, before whom the ſoldiers were brought; they repeated their former aſſertions; and one of the fugitives added, that he had a brother, whoſe place of guard over the perſon of the Earl on that night, had made it difficult to elude obſervation, and had prevented his eſcaping with them: that on the night of the morrow he ſtood guard at the gate of the leſſer draw-bridge, where the centinels were few; that he was himſelf willing to riſque the danger of converſing with him; and had little doubt

doubt of gaining him to aſſiſt in the deliverance of the Earl. At theſe words, the heart of Alleyn throbbed with joy. He promiſed large rewards to the brave ſoldier and to his brother, if they undertook the enterprize. His companion was well acquainted with the ſubterraneous paſſages of the rock, and expreſſed himſelf deſirous of being uſeful. The hopes of Alleyn every inſtant grew ſtronger; and he vainly wiſhed, at that moment, to communicate to the Earl's unhappy family the joy which dilated his heart.

The eve of the following day was fixed upon to commence their deſigns; when James ſhould endeavour to gain his brother to their purpoſe. Having adjuſted theſe matters, they retired to reſt for the remainder of the night; but ſleep had fled the eyes of Alleyn; anxious expectation filled his mind; and he ſaw, in the waking viſions of fancy, the

the meeting of the Earl with his family; he anticipated the thanks he ſhould receive from the lovely Mary; and he ſighed at the recollection, that thanks were all for which he could ever dare to hope.

At length the dawn appeared, and waked the clan to hopes and proſpects far different from thoſe of the preceding morn. The hours hung heavily on the expectation of Alleyn, whoſe mind was filled with ſolicitude for the event of the meeting between the brothers. Night at length came to his wiſhes. The darkneſs was interrupted only by the faint light of the moon moving through the watery and broken clouds, which enveloped the horizon. Tumultuous guſts of wind broke at intervals the ſilence of the hour. Alleyn watched the movements of the caſtle; he obſerved the lights ſucceſſively diſappear. The bell from the watch-tower chimed one; all

was

was ſtill within the walls; and James ventured forth to the draw-bridge. The draw-bridge divided in the center, and the half next the plains was down; he mounted it, and in a low yet firm voice, called on Edmund. No anſwer was returned; and he began to fear that his brother had already quitted the caſtle. He remained ſome time in ſilent ſuſpenſe before he repeated the call, when he heard the gate of the draw-bridge gently unbarred, and Edmund appeared. He was ſurprized to ſee James, and bade him inſtantly fly the danger that ſurrounded him. The Baron, incenſed at the frequent deſertion of his ſoldiers, had ſent out people in purſuit, and had promiſed conſiderable rewards for the apprehenſion of the fugitives. James, undaunted by what he heard, kept his ground, reſolved to urge his purpoſe to the point. Happily the centinels who ſtood guard with Edmund, overcome with the effect of a potion he had adminiſtered

ever, to linger in ſuſpenſe till the third night from the preſent, when the return of Edmund to his ſtation at the bridge would enable him again to commune with his brother. But Alleyn was unſuſpicious of a circumſtance which would utterly have defeated his hopes, and whoſe conſequence threatened deſtruction to all their ſchemes. A centinel on duty upon that part of the rampart which ſurmounted the draw-bridge, had been alarmed by hearing the gate unbar, and approaching the wall, had perceived a man ſtanding on the half of the bridge which was dropped, and in converſe with ſome perſon on the caſtle walls. He drew as near as the wall would permit, and endeavoured to liſten to their diſcourſe. The gloom of night prevented his recognizing the perſon on the bridge; but he could clearly diſtinguiſh the voice of Edmund in that of the man who was addreſſed. Excited by new wonder, he gave all his attention

attention to diſcover the ſubject of their converſation. The diſtance occaſioned between the brothers by the ſuſpended half of the bridge, obliged them to ſpeak in a ſomewhat higher tone than they would otherwiſe have done; and the centinel gathered ſufficient from their diſcourſe, to learn that they were concerting the reſcue of the Earl; that the night of Edmund's watch at the priſon was to be the night of enterprize; and that ſome friends of the Earl were to await him in the environs of the caſtle. All this he carefully treaſured up, and the next morning communicated it to his comrades.

On the following evening the Earl, yielding to the impulſe of his heart, once more uncloſed his partition, and ſought the apartments of the Baroneſs. She received him with expreſſions of ſatisfaction; while the artleſs pleaſure which lighted up the countenance of Laura,

Laura, awakened the pulſe of rapture in that heart which had long throbbed only to miſery. The Earl reminded the Baroneſs of her former promiſe, which the deſire of exciting ſympathy in thoſe we eſteem, and the melancholy pleaſure which the heart finds in lingering among the ſcenes of former happineſs, had induced her to give. She endeavoured to compoſe her ſpirits, which were agitated by the remembrance of paſt ſufferings, and gave him a relation of the following circumſtances.

CHAPTER VII.

LOUISA, Baroneſs Malcolm, was the deſcendant of an ancient and honourable houſe in Switzerland. Her father, the Marquis de St. Claire, inherited all thoſe brave qualities, and that ſtern virtue, which had ſo eminently diſtinguiſhed his anceſtors. Early in life he loſt a wife whom he tenderly loved, and he ſeemed to derive his ſole conſolation from the education of the dear children ſhe had left behind. His ſon, whom he had brought up to the arms himſelf ſo honourably bore, fell before he reached his nineteenth year, in the ſervice of his country; an elder daughter died in infancy; Louiſa was his ſole ſurviving child. His chateau was ſituated in one of thoſe delightful vallies of the Swiſs cantons, in which the beautiful and the ſublime are ſo happily united; where the magnificent features of the

the ſcenery are contraſted, and their effect heightened by the blooming luxuriance of woods and paſturage, by the gentle windings of the ſtream, and the peaceful aſpect of the cottage. The Marquis was now retired from the ſervice, for grey age had overtaken him. His reſidence was the reſort of foreigners of diſtinction, who, attracted by the united talents of the ſoldier and the philoſopher, under his roof partook of the hoſpitality ſo characteriſtic of his country. Among the viſitors of this deſcription was the late Baron Malcolm, brother to the preſent Chief, who then travelled through Switzerland. The beauty of Louiſa, embelliſhed by the elegance of a mind highly cultivated, touched his heart, and he ſolicited her hand in marriage. The manly ſenſe of the Baron, and the excellencies of his diſpoſition, had not paſſed unobſerved, or unapproved by the Marquis; while the graces of his perſon, and of

his

his mind, had anticipated for him, in the heart of Louiſa, a pre-eminence over every other ſuitor. The Marquis had but one objection to the marriage; this was likewiſe the objection of Louiſa: neither the one nor the other could endure the idea of the diſtance which was to ſeparate them. Louiſa was to the Marquis the laſt prop of his declining years; the Marquis was to Louiſa the father and the friend to whom her heart had hitherto been ſolely devoted, and from whom it could not now be torn but with an anguiſh equal to its attachment. This remained an inſurmountable obſtacle, till it was removed by the tenderneſs of the Baron, who entreated the Marquis to quit Switzerland, and reſide with his daughter in Scotland. The attachment of the Marquis to his natal land, and the pride of hereditary dominion, was too powerful to ſuffer him to acquieſce in the propoſal without much ſtruggle of contending feelings.

The deſire of ſecuring the happineſs of his child, by a union with a character ſo excellent as the Baron's, and of ſeeing her ſettled before death ſhould deprive her of the protection of a father, at length ſubdued every other conſideration, and he reſigned the hand of his daughter to the Baron Malcolm. The Marquis adjuſted his affairs, and conſigning his eſtates to the care of truſty agents, bade a laſt adieu to his beloved country; that country which, during ſixty years, had been the principal ſcene of his happineſs, and of his regrets. The courſe of years had not obliterated from his heart the early affections of his youth: he took a ſad farewell of that grave which encloſed the reliques of his wife, from which it was not his leaſt effort to depart, and whither he ordered that his remains ſhould be conveyed. Louiſa quitted Switzerland with a concern ſcarcely leſs acute than that of her father; the poignancy of

of which, however, was greatly ſoftened by the tender aſſiduities of her Lord, whoſe affectionate attentions hourly heightened her eſteem, and encreaſed her love.

They arrived at Scotland without any accident, where the Baron welcomed Louiſa as the miſtreſs of his domains. The Marquis de St. Claire had apartments in the caſtle, where the evening of his days declined in peaceful happineſs. Before his death, he had the pleaſure of ſeeing his race renewed in the children of the Baroneſs, in a ſon who was called by the name of the Marquis, and in a daughter who now ſhared with her mother the ſorrows of confinement. On the death of the Marquis it was neceſſary for the Baron to viſit Switzerland, in order to take poſſeſſion of his eſtates, and to adjuſt ſome affairs which a long abſence had deranged. He attended the remains of the Marquis to

their laſt abode. The Baroneſs, deſirous of once more beholding her native country, and anxious to pay a laſt reſpect to the memory of her father, entruſted her children to the care of a faithful old ſervant, whom ſhe had brought with her from the Vallois, and who had been the nurſe of her early childhood, and accompanied the Baron to the continent. Having depoſited the remains of the Marquis according to his wiſh in the tomb of his wife, and arranged their affairs, they returned to Scotland, where the firſt intelligence they received on their arrival at the caſtle, was of the death of their ſon, and of the old nurſe his attendant. The ſervant had died ſoon after their departure; the child only a fortnight before their return. This diſaſtrous event affected equally the Baron and his lady, who never ceaſed to condemn herſelf for having entruſted her ſon to the care of ſervants. Time, however, ſubdued the poignancy of this

affliction, but came fraught with another yet more acute; this was the death of the Baron, who, in the pride of youth, conſtituting the felicity of his family, and of his people, was killed by a fall from his horſe, which he received in hunting. He left the Baroneſs and an only daughter to bewail with unceaſing ſorrow his loſs.

The paternal eſtates devolved of courſe to his only brother, the preſent Baron, whoſe character formed a mournful and ſtriking contraſt to that of the deceaſed Lord. All his perſonal property, which was conſiderable, with the eſtates in Switzerland, he bequeathed to his beloved wife and daughter. The new Baron, immediately on the demiſe of his brother, took poſſeſſion of the caſtle, but allowed the Baroneſs, with a part of her ſuit, to remain its inhabitant till the expiration of the year. The Baroneſs, abſorbed in grief, ſtill loved to

recall, in the ſcene of her late felicity, the image of her Lord, and to linger in his former haunts. This motive, together with the neceſſity of preparation for a journey to Switzerland, induced her to accept the offer of the Baron.

The memory of his brother had quickly faded from the mind of Malcolm, whoſe attention appeared to be wholly occupied by ſchemes of avarice and ambition. His arrogance, and boundleſs love of power, embroiled him with the neighbouring Chiefs, and engaged him in continual hoſtility. He ſeldom viſited the Baroneſs; when he did, his manner was cold, and even haughty. The Baroneſs, ſhocked to receive ſuch treatment from the brother of her deceaſed Lord, and reduced to feel herſelf an unwelcome gueſt in that caſtle which ſhe had been accuſtomed to conſider as her own, determined to ſet off for the continent immediately.

mediately, and ſeek, in the ſolitudes of her native mountains, an aſylum from the frown of inſulting power. The contraſt of character between the brothers drew many a ſigh of bitter recollection from her heart, and added weight to the ſorrows which already oppreſſed it. She gave orders, therefore, to her domeſtics, to prepare for immediate departure; but was ſoon after told that the Baron had forbad them to obey the command. Aſtoniſhed at this circumſtance, ſhe had not time to demand an explanation, ere a meſſage from Malcolm required a few moments private converſation. The meſſenger was followed almoſt inſtantly by the Baron, who entered the apartment with hurried ſteps, his countenance overſpread with the dark purpoſes of his ſoul. "I come, Madam," ſaid he, in a voice ſtern and determined, "to inform you, that you quit not this caſtle. The eſtates which you call yours, are mine; and think not that I ſhall

neglect to profecute my claim. The frequent and ill-timed generofities of my brother, have diminifhed the value of the lands which are mine by inheritance; and I have therefore an indifpenfable right to re-pay myfelf from thofe eftates which he acquired with you. In point of juftice, he poffeffed not the right of devifing thefe eftates, and I fhall not fuffer myfelf to be deceived by the evafions of the law; refign, therefore, the will, which remains only a record of unjuft wifhes, and ineffectual claims. When the receipts from your eftates have fatisfied my demands, they fhall again be yours. The apartments you now inhabit fhall remain your own; but beyond the wall of this caftle you fhall not pafs; for I will not, by fuffering your departure, afford you an opportunity of conteſting thofe rights which I can enforce without oppofition."

Overcome

Overcome with aſtoniſhment and dread, the Baroneſs was for ſome time deprived of all power of reply. At length, rouſed by the ſpirit of indignation; "I am too well informed, my Lord," ſaid ſhe, "of my juſt claims to the lands in queſtion; and know alſo too well the value of that integrity which is now no more, to credit your bold aſſertions; they ſerve only to unveil to me the darkneſs of a character, cruel and rapacious; whoſe boundleſs avarice, trampling on the barriers of juſtice and humanity, ſeizes on the right of the defenceleſs widow, and on the portion of the unreſiſting orphan. This, my Lord, you are permitted to do; they have no means of reſiſtance; but think not to impoſe on me by a ſophiſtical aſſertion of right, or to gloſs the villany of your conduct with the colours of juſtice; the artifice is beneath the deſperate force of your character, and is not ſufficiently ſpecious to deceive the

diſcernment of virtue. From being your priſoner I have no means of eſcaping; but never, my Lord, will I reſign into your hands that will which is the efficient bond of my rights, and the laſt ſad record of the affection of my departed Lord." Grief cloſed her lips. The Baron denouncing vengeance on her reſiſtance, his features inflamed with rage, quitted the apartment. The Baroneſs was left to lament, with deepening anguiſh, the ſtroke which had deprived her of a beloved huſband; and reflection gave her the wretchedneſs of her ſituation in yet more lively colours. She was now a ſtranger in a foreign land, deprived by him, of whom ſhe had a right to demand protection, of all her poſſeſſions; a priſoner in his caſtle, without one friend to vindicate her cauſe, and far remote from any means of appeal to the laws of the country. She wept over the youthful Laura, and while ſhe preſſed her with mournful fondneſs

fondneſs to her boſom, ſhe was confirmed in her reſolution never to relinquiſh that will, by which alone the rights of her injured child could ever be aſcertained.

The Baron, bold in iniquity, obtained, by forged powers, the revenues of the foreign eſtates; and by this means, effectually kept the Baroneſs in his power, and deprived her of her laſt reſource. Secure in the poſſeſſion of the eſtates, and of the Baroneſs, he no longer regarded the will as an object of importance; and as ſhe did not attempt any means of eſcape, or the recovery of her rights, he ſuffered her to remain undiſturbed, and in quiet poſſeſſion of the will.

The Baroneſs now paſſed her days in unvaried ſorrow, except in thoſe intervals when ſhe forced her mind from its melancholy ſubject, and devoted herſelf

to the education of her daughter. The artleſs efforts of Laura, to aſſuage the ſorrows of her mother, only fixed them in her heart in deeper impreſſion, ſince they gave to her mind, in ſtronger tints, the cruelty and oppreſſion to which her tender years were condemned. The progreſs which ſhe made in muſic and drawing, and in the lighter ſubjects of literature, while it pleaſed the Baroneſs, who was her ſole inſtructreſs, brought with it the bitter apprehenſion, that theſe accompliſhments would probably be buried in the obſcurity of a priſon; ſtill, however, they were not uſeleſs, ſince they ſerved at preſent to cheat affliction of many a weary moment, and would in future delude the melancholy hours of ſolitude. Laura was particularly fond of the lute, which ſhe touched with exquiſite ſenſibility, and whoſe tender notes were ſo ſweetly in uniſon with the chords of ſorrow, and with thoſe plaintive tones with which ſhe loved to accompany

accompany it. While ſhe ſung, the Baroneſs would ſit abſorbed in recollection, the tears faſt falling from her eyes, and ſhe might be ſaid to taſte in thoſe moments the luxury of woe.

Malcolm, ſtung with a ſenſe of guilt, avoided the preſence of his injured captive, and ſought an aſylum from conſcience in the buſy ſcenes of war.

Eighteen years had now elapſed ſince the death of the Baron, and the confinement of Louiſa. Time had blunted the point of affliction, though it ſtill retained its venom; but ſhe ſeldom dared to hope for that which for eighteen years had been with-held. She derived her only conſolation from the improvement and the tender ſympathy of her daughter, who endeavoured, by every ſoothing attention, to alleviate the ſorrows of her parent.

It

It was at this period that the Baroneſs communicated to the Earl the ſtory of her calamities.

The Earl liſtened with deep attention to the recital. His ſoul burned with indignation againſt the Baron, while his heart gave to the ſufferings of the fair mourners all that ſympathy could aſk. Yet he was relieved from a very painful ſenſation, when he learned that the beauty of Laura had not influenced the conduct of the Baron. Her oppreſſed ſituation ſtruck upon his heart the fineſt touch of pity; and the paſſion which her beauty and her ſimplicity had inſpired, was ſtrengthened and meliorated by her misfortunes. The fate of his father, and the idea of his own injuries, ruſhed upon his mind; and, combining with the ſufferings of the victims now before him, rouſed in his ſoul a ſtorm of indignation, little inferior

to

to that he had ſuffered in his firſt interview with the Baron. Every conſideration ſunk before the impulſe of a juſt revenge; his mind, occupied with the hateful image of the murderer was hardened againſt danger, and in the firſt energies of his reſentment he would have ruſhed to the apartment of Malcolm, and ſtriking the ſword of juſtice in his heart, have delivered the earth from a monſter, and have reſigned himſelf the willing ſacrifice of the action. "Shall the monſter live?" cried he, riſing from his ſeat. His ſtep was hurried, and his countenance was ſtamped with a ſtern virtue. The Baroneſs was alarmed, and following him to the door of her apartment, which he had half opened, conjured him to pauſe for a moment on the dangers that ſurrounded him. The voice of reaſon, in the accents of the Baroneſs, interrupted the hurried tumult of his ſoul; the illuſions of paſſion diſappeared;

peared; he recollected that he was ignorant of the apartment of the Baron, and that he had no weapon to aſſiſt his purpoſe; and he found himſelf as a traveller on enchanted ground, when the wand of the magician ſuddenly diſſolves the airy ſcene, and leaves him environed with the horrors of ſolitude and of darkneſs.

The Earl returned to his ſeat hopeleſs and dejected, and loſt to every thing but to the bitterneſs of diſappointment. He forgot where he was, and the lateneſs of the hour, till reminded by the Baroneſs of the dangers of a longer ſtay, when he mournfully bade her good night; and advancing to Laura with timid reſpect, preſſed her hand tenderly to his lips, and retired to his priſon.

CHAP-

CHAPTER VIII.

HE had now opened the partition, and was entering the room, when, by the faint gleam which the fire threw acroſs the apartment, he perceived indiſtinctly the figure of a man, and in the ſame inſtant heard the ſound of approaching armour. Surprize and horror thrilled through every nerve: he remained fixed to the ſpot, and for ſome moments hesitated whether to retire. A fearful ſilence enſued; the perſon whom he thought he had ſeen, diſappeared in the darkneſs of the room; the noiſe of armour was heard no more; and he began to think that the figure he had ſeen, and the ſound he had heard, were the phantoms of a ſick imagination, which the agitation of his ſpirits, the ſolemnity of the hour, and the wide deſolation of the place, had conjured up.

The

The low ſounds of an unknown voice now ſtarted upon his ear; it ſeemed to be almoſt cloſe beſide him; he ſprung onward, and his hand graſped the ſteely coldneſs of armour, while the arm it encloſed ſtruggled to get free. "Speak! what wretch art thou?" cried Oſbert, when a ſudden blaze of light from the fire diſcovered to him a ſoldier of the Baron. His agitation for ſome time prevented his obſerving that there was more of alarm than of deſign expreſſed in the countenance of the man; but the apprehenſion of the Earl was quickly loſt in aſtoniſhment, when he beheld the guard at his feet. It was Edmund who had entered the priſon under pretence of carrying fuel to the fire, but ſecretly for the purpoſe of conferring with Oſbert. When the Earl underſtood he came from Alleyn, his boſom glowed with gratitude towards that generous youth, whoſe ſteady and active zeal had never relaxed ſince the hour in which

which he firſt engaged in his cauſe. The tranſport of his heart may be eaſily imagined, when he learned the ſchemes that were planning for his deliverance. The circumſtance which had nearly defeated the warm hopes of his friends, was by him diſregarded, ſince the knowledge of the ſecret door opened to him, with the aſſiſtance of a guide through the intricacies of the caſtle, a certain means of eſcape. Edmund was well acquainted with all theſe. The Earl told him of the diſcovery of the falſe pannel; bade him return to Alleyn with the joyful intelligence, and on his next night of watch prepare to aid him in eſcape. Edmund knew well the apartments which Oſbert deſcribed, and the great ſtaircaſe which led into a part of the caſtle that had long been totally forſaken, and from whence it was eaſy to paſs unobſerved into the vaults which communicated

cated with the ſubterraneous paſſages in the rock.

Alleyn heard the report of James with a warm and generous joy, which impelled him to haſten immediately to the caſtle of Athlin, and diſpel the ſorrows that inhabited there; but the conſideration that his ſudden abſence from the camp might create ſuſpicion, and invite diſcovery, checked the impulſe; and he yielded with reluctance to the neceſſity which condemned the Counteſs and Mary to the horrors of a lengthened ſuſpenſe.

The Counteſs, meanwhile, whoſe deſigns, ſtrengthened by the ſteady determination of Mary, were unſhaken by the meſſage of the Earl, which ſhe conſidered as only the effect of a momentary impulſe, watched the gradual departure of thoſe days which led to that which enveloped the fate of her children, with agony

ny and fainting hope. She received no news from the camp; no words of comfort from Alleyn; and ſhe ſaw the confidence which had nouriſhed her exiſtence ſlowly ſinking in deſpair. Mary ſought to adminiſter that comfort to the afflictions of her mother, which her own equally demanded; ſhe ſtrove, by the fortitude with which ſhe endeavoured to reſign herſelf, to ſoften the aſperity of the ſufferings which threatened the Counteſs; and ſhe contemplated the approaching ſtorm with the determined coolneſs of a mind aſpiring to virtue as the chief good. But ſhe ſedulouſly ſought to exclude Alleyn from her mind; his diſintereſted and noble conduct excited emotions dangerous to her fortitude, and which rendered yet more poignant the tortures of the approaching ſacrifice.

Anxious to inform the Baroneſs of his approaching deliverance, to aſſure her

her of his beſt ſervices, to bid adieu to Laura, and to ſeize the laſt opportunity he might ever poſſeſs of diſcloſing to her his admiration and his love, the Earl reviſited the apartments of the Baroneſs. She felt a lively pleaſure on the proſpect of his eſcape; and Laura, in the joy which animated her on hearing this intelligence, forgot the ſorrows of her own ſituation; forgot that of which her heart ſoon reminded her—that Oſbert was leaving the place of her confinement, and that ſhe ſhould probably ſee him no more. This thought caſt a ſudden ſhade over her features, and from the enlivening expreſſion of joy, they reſumed their wonted melancholy. Oſbert marked the momentary change, and his heart ſpoke to him the occaſion. "My cup of joy is daſhed with bitterneſs," ſaid he, "for amid the happineſs of approaching deliverance, I quit not my priſon without ſome pangs of keen regret;—pangs which it were probably

uſeleſs

uſeleſs to make known, yet which my feelings will not ſuffer me at this moment to conceal. Within theſe walls, from whence I fly with eagerneſs, I leave a heart fraught with the moſt tender paſſion;—a heart which, while it beats with life, muſt ever unite the image of Laura with the fondneſs of love. Could I hope that ſhe were not inſenſible to my attachment I ſhould depart in peace, and would defy the obſtacles which bid me deſpair. Were I even certain that ſhe would repel my love with cold indifference, I would yet, if ſhe accept my ſervices, effect her reſcue, or give my life the forfeiture." Laura was ſilent; ſhe wiſhed to ſpeak her gratitude, yet feared to tell her love; but the ſoft timidity of her eye, and the tender glow of her cheek, revealed the ſecret that trembled on her lips. The Baroneſs obſerved her confuſion, and thanking the Earl for the noble ſervice he offered, declined accepting it. She beſought

beſought him to involve no further the peace of his family and of himſelf, by attempting an enterprize ſo crowded with dangers, and which might probably coſt him his life. The arguments of the Baroneſs fell forceleſs when oppoſed to the feelings of the Earl; ſo warmly he urged his ſuit, and dwelt ſo forcibly on his approaching departure, that the Baroneſs ceaſed to oppoſe, and the ſilence of Laura yielded acquieſcence.' After a tender farewell, with many earneſt wiſhes for his ſafety, the Earl quitted the apartment elated with hope. But the Baron had been informed of his projected eſcape, and had ſtudied the means of counteracting it. The centinel had communicated his diſcovery to ſome of his comrades, who, without virtue or courage ſufficient to quit the ſervice of the Baron, were deſirous of obtaining his favour, and failed not to ſeize on an opportunity, ſo flattering as the preſent, to accompliſh

their

their purpoſe. They communicated to their Chief the intelligence they had received.

Malcolm, careful to conceal his knowledge of the ſcheme, from a deſign to entrap thoſe of the clan who were to meet the Earl, had ſuffered Edmund to return to his ſtation at the priſon, where he had placed the informers as ſecret guards, and had taken ſuch other precautions as were neceſſary to intercept their flight, ſhould they elude the vigilance of the ſoldiers, and likewiſe to ſecure thoſe of his people who ſhould be drawn toward the caſtle in expectation of their Chief. Having done this, he prided himſelf in ſecurity, and in the certainty of exulting over his enemies, thus entangled in their own ſtratagem.

After many weary moments of impatience to Alleyn, and of expectation to the Earl, the night at length arrived on

which hung the event of all their hopes. It was agreed that Alleyn, with a choſen few, ſhould await the arrival of the Earl in the cavern where terminated the ſubterraneous avenue. Alleyn parted from James with extreme agitation, and returned to his tent to compoſe his mind.

It was now the dead of night; profound ſleep reigned through the caſtle of Dunbayne, when Edmund gently unbolted the priſon door, and hailed the Earl. He ſprung forward, and inſtantly uncloſed the pannel, which they faſtened after them to prevent diſcovery, and paſſing with fearful ſteps the cold and ſilent apartments, deſcended the great ſtair-caſe into the hall, whoſe wide and dark deſolation was rendered viſible only by the dim light of the taper which Edmund carried in his hand, and whoſe vaulted ceiling re-echoed their ſteps. After various windings

ings they deſcended into the vaults; in paſſing their dreary length they often pauſed in fearful ſilence, liſtening to the hollow blaſts which burſt ſuddenly through the paſſages, and which ſeemed to bear in the ſound the footſteps of purſuit. At length they reached the extremity of the vaults, where Edmund ſearched for a trap-door which lay almoſt concealed in the dirt and darkneſs; after ſome time they found, and with difficulty raiſed it, for it was long ſince it had been opened; and it was beſides heavy with iron work. They entered, and letting the door fall after them, deſcended a narrow flight of ſteps which conducted them to a winding paſſage cloſed by a door that opened into the main avenue whence Alleyn had before made his eſcape. Having gained this, they ſtepped on with confidence, for they where now not far from the cavern were Alleyn and his companions were awaiting their arrival. The heart

of Alleyn now ſwelled with joy, for he perceived a gleam of diſtant light break upon the walls of the avenue, and at the ſame time thought he heard the faint ſound of approaching footſteps. Impatient to throw himſelf at the feet of the Earl, he entered the avenue. The light grew ſtronger upon the walls; but a point of rock, whoſe projection cauſed a winding in the paſſage, concealed from his view the perſons his eyes ſo eagerly ſought. The ſound of ſteps was now faſt approaching, and Alleyn gaining the rock, ſuddenly turned upon three ſoldiers of the Baron. They inſtantly ſeized him their priſoner. Aſtoniſhment for a while overcame every other ſenſation; but as they led him along, the horrid reverſe of the moment ſtruck upon his heart with all its conſequences, and he had no doubt that the Earl had been ſeized and carred back to his priſon. As he marched along, abſorbed in this reflection, a light appeared at ſome

ſome diſtance, from a door that opened upon the avenue, and diſcovered the figures of two men, who on perceiving the party, retreated with precipitation, and cloſed the door after them. Alleyn knew the Earl in the perſon of one of them. Two of the ſoldiers quitting Alleyn, purſued the fugitives, and quickly diſappeared through a door. Alleyn finding himſelf alone with the guard, ſeized the moment of opportunity, and made a deſperate effort to regain his ſword. He ſucceeded; and in the ſuddenneſs of the attack, obtained alſo the weapon of his adverſary, who, unarmed, fell at his feet, and called for mercy. Alleyn gave him his life. The ſoldier, grateful for the gift, and fearful of the Baron's vengeance, deſired to fly with him, and enliſt in his ſervice. They quitted the ſubterraneous way together. On entering the cavern, Alleyn found it vacated by his friends, who on hearing the claſh of armour, and the

loud and menacing voices of the ſoldiers, underſtood his fate, and apprehenſive of numbers, had fled to avoid a ſimilar diſaſter. Alleyn returned to his tent, ſhocked with diſappointment, and loſt in deſpair. Every effort which he had made for the deliverance of the Earl, had proved unſucceſsful; and this ſcheme, on which was ſuſpended his laſt hope, had been defeated at the very moment when he exulted in its completion. He threw himſelf on the ground, and loſt in bitter thought, obſerved not the curtain of his tent undraw, till recalled by a ſudden noiſe, he looked up, and beheld the Earl. Terror fixed him to the ſpot, and for a moment he involuntarily acknowledged the traditionary viſions of his nation. The well-known voice of Oſbert, however, awakened him to truth, and the ardor with which he embraced his knees, immediately convinced him that he claſped reality.

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The ſoldiers, in the eagerneſs of purſuit, had miſtaken the door by which Oſbert had retired, and had entered one below it, which, after engaging them in a fruitleſs ſearch through various intricate paſſages, had conducted them to a remote part of the caſtle, from whence, after much perplexity and loſs of time, they were at length extricated. The Earl, who had retreated on ſight of the ſoldiers, had fled in the mean time to regain the trap-door; but the united ſtrength of himſelf and of Edmund was in vain exerted to open it. Compelled to encounter the approaching evil, the Earl took the ſword of his companion, reſolving to meet the approach of his adverſaries, and to effect his deliverance, or yield his life and his misfortunes to the attempt. With this deſign he advanced deliberately along the paſſage, and arriving at the door, ſtopped to diſcover the motions of his purſuers: all was profoundly ſilent. After re-

maining ſome time in this ſituation, he opened the door, and examining the avenue with a firm yet anxious eye as far as the light of his taper threw its beams, diſcovered no human being. He proceeded with cautious firmneſs towards the cavern, every inſtant expecting the ſoldiers to ſtart ſuddenly upon him from ſome dark receſs.—With aſtoniſhment he reached the cave without interruption; and unable to account for his unexpected deliverance, haſtened with Edmund to join his faithful people.

The ſoldiers who watched the priſon, being ignorant of any other way by which the Earl could eſcape, than the door which they guarded, had ſuffered Edmund to enter the apartment without fear. It was ſome time before they diſcovered their error; ſurprized at the length of his ſtay, they opened the door of the priſon, which, to their utter aſtoniſhment,

niſhment, they found empty. The grates were examined; they remained as uſual; every corner was explored; but the falſe pannel remained unknown; and having finiſhed their examination without diſcovering any viſible means by which the Earl had quitted the priſon, they were ſeized with terror, concluding it to be the work of a ſupernatural power, and immediately alarmed the caſtle. The Baron, rouſed by the tumult, was informed of the fact, and dubious of the integrity of his guards, aſcended to the apartment; which having himſelf examined without diſcovering any means of eſcape, he no longer heſitated to pronounce the centinels acceſſary to the Earl's enlargement. The unfeigned terror which they exhibited was miſtaken for artifice, and their ſuppoſed treachery was admitted and puniſhed in the ſame moment. They were thrown into the dungeon of the caſtle. Soldiers were immediately diſpatched in purſuit; but the time

which had elapſed ere the guards had entered the priſon, had given the Earl an opportunity of eſcape. When the certainty of this was communicated to the Baron, every paſſion whoſe ſingle force is miſery, united in his breaſt to torture him; and his brain, exaſperated almoſt to madneſs, gave him only direful images of revenge.

The Baroneſs and Laura, awakened by the tumult, had been filled with apprehenſion for the Earl, till they were informed of the cauſe of the general confuſion; and hope and dubious joy were ere long confirmed into certainty, for they were told of the fruitleſs ſearch of the purſuers.

It was now the laſt day of the term in which the Counteſs had ſtipulated to return her anſwer; ſhe had yet heard nothing from Alleyn; for Alleyn had been buſied in ſchemes, of the event of which

which he could ſend no account, for their ſucceſs had been yet undetermined. Every hope of the Earl's deliverance was now expired, and in the anguiſh of her heart, the Counteſs prepared to give that anſwer which would ſend the devoted Mary to the arms of the murderer. Mary, who aſſumed a fortitude not her own, ſtrove to abate the rigor of her mother's ſufferings, but vainly ſtrove; they were of a nature which defied conſolation. She wrote the fatal agreement, but delayed till the laſt moment delivering it into the hands of the meſſenger. It was neceſſary, however, that the Baron ſhould receive it on the following morn, leſt the impatience of revenge ſhould urge him to ſeize on the life of the Earl as the forfeiture of delay. She ſent, therefore, for the meſſenger, who was a veteran of the clan, and with extreme agitation delivered to him her anſwer; grief interrupted her voice; ſhe was unable to ſpeak to him; and he was

awaiting her orders, when the door of the apartment was thrown open, and the Earl, followed by Alleyn, threw himſelf at her feet. A faint ſcream was uttered by the Counteſs, and ſhe ſunk in her chair. Mary, not daring to truſt herſelf with the delightful viſion, endeavoured to reſtrain the tide of joy, which hurried to her heart, and threatened to overwhelm her.

The caſtle of Athlin reſounded with tumultuous joy on this happy event; the courts were filled with thoſe of the clan who had been diſabled from attending the field, and whom the report of the Earl's return, which had circulated with aſtoniſhing rapidity, had brought thither. The hall re-echoed with voices; and the people could hardly be reſtrained from ruſhing into the preſence of their Chief, to congratulate him on his eſcape.

When the firſt tranſports of the meeting were ſubſided, the Earl preſented Alleyn to his family as his friend and deliverer; whoſe ſteady attachment he could never forget, and whoſe zealous ſervices he could never repay. The cheek of Mary glowed with pleaſure and gratitude at this tribute to the worth of Alleyn; and the ſmiling approbation of her eyes rewarded him for his noble deeds. The Counteſs received him as the deliverer of both her children, and related to Oſbert the adventure in the wood. The Earl embraced Alleyn, who received the united acknowledgments of the family, with unaffected modeſty. Oſbert heſitated not to pronounce the Baron the author of the plot; his heart ſwelled to avenge the repeated injuries of his family, and he ſecretly reſolved to challenge his enemy to ſingle combat. To renew the ſiege he conſidered as a vain project; and this challenge, though a very inadequate mode of revenge, was the only honourable

honourable one that remained for him. He forbore to mention his deſign to the Counteſs, well knowing that her tenderneſs would oppoſe the meaſure, and throw difficulties in his way, which would embarraſs, without preventing his purpoſe. He mentioned the misfortunes of the Baroneſs, and the lovelineſs of her daughter, and excited the eſteem and the commiſeration of his hearers.

The clamours of the people to behold their Lord, now aroſe to the apartment of the Counteſs, and he deſcended into the hall, accompanied by Alleyn, to gratify their zeal. An univerſal ſhout of joy reſounded through the walls on his appearance. A noble pleaſure glowed on the countenance of the Earl at ſight of his faithful people; and in the delight of that moment his heart bore teſtimony to the ſuperior advantages of an equitable government.

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The Earl, impatient to teſtify his gratitude, introduced Alleyn to the clan, as his friend and deliverer, and immediately preſented his father with a lot of land, where he might end his days in peace and plenty. Old Alleyn thanked the Earl for his offered kindneſs, but declined accepting it; alledging, that he was attached to his old cottage, and that he had already ſufficient for the comforts of his age.

On the following morning, a meſſenger was privately diſpatched to the Baron, with the challenge of the Earl. The challenge was couched in terms of haughty indignation, and expreſſed, that nothing but the failure of all other means could have urged him to the condeſcenſion of meeting the aſſaſſin of his father, on terms of equal combat.

Happineſs was once more reſtored to Athlin. The Counteſs, in the unexpected

pected preſervation of her children, ſeemed to be alive only to joy. The Earl was now for a time ſecure in the boſom of his family, and, though his impatience to avenge the injuries of thoſe moſt dear to him, and to ſnatch from the hand of oppreſſion the fair ſufferers at Dunbayne, would not allow him to be tranquil, yet he aſſumed a gaiety unknown to his heart, and the days were ſpent in feſtivals and joy.

CHAP-

CHAPTER IX.

IT was at this period, that, one ſtormy evening, the Counteſs was ſitting with her family in a room, the windows of which looked upon the ſea. The winds burſt in ſudden ſqualls over the deep, and daſhed the foaming waves againſt the rocks with inconceivable fury. The ſpray, notwithſtanding the high ſituation of the caſtle, flew up with violence againſt the windows. The Earl went out upon the terrace beneath to contemplate the ſtorm. The moon ſhone faintly by intervals, through broken clouds upon the waters, illuming the white foam which burſt around, and enlightening the ſcene ſufficiently to render it viſible. The ſurges broke on the diſtant ſhores in deep reſounding murmurs, and the ſolemn pauſes between the ſtormy guſts filled the mind with enthuſiaſtic

enthuſiaſtic awe. As the Earl ſtood wrapt in the ſublimity of the ſcene, the moon, ſuddenly emerging from a heavy cloud, ſhewed him at ſome diſtance a veſſel driven by the fury of the blaſt towards the coaſt. He preſently heard the ſignals of diſtreſs; and ſoon after ſhrieks of terror, and a confuſed uproar of voices were borne on the wind. He haſtened from the terrace to order his people to go out with boats to the aſſiſtance of the crew, for he doubted not that the veſſel was wrecked; but the ſea ran ſo high as to make the adventure impracticable. The ſound of voices ceaſed, and he concluded that the wretched mariners were loſt, when the ſcreams of diſtreſs again ſtruck his ear, and again were loſt in the tumult of the ſtorm; in a moment after, the veſſel ſtruck upon the rock beneath the caſtle; an univerſal ſhriek enſued. The Earl, with his people, haſtened to the aſſiſtance of the crew; the fury of the guſt was now abated,

abated, and the Earl, jumping into a boat with Alleyn and ſome others, rowed to the ſhip, where they reſcued a part of the drowning people. They were conducted to the caſtle, and every comfort was liberally adminiſtered to them. Among thoſe, whom the Earl had received into his boat, was a ſtranger, whoſe dignified aſpect and manners beſpoke him to be of rank; he had ſeveral people belonging to him, but they were foreigners, and ignorant of the language of the country. He thanked his deliverer with a noble frankneſs, that charmed him. In the hall they were met by the Counteſs and her daughter, who received the ſtranger with the warm welcome, which compaſſion for his ſituation had inſpired. He was conducted to the ſupper room, where the magnificence of the board exhibited only the uſual hoſpitality of his hoſt. The ſtranger ſpoke Engliſh fluently, and diſplayed in his converſation a manly and vigorous

vigorous mind, acquainted with the ſciences, and with life; and the caſt of his obſervations ſeemed to characterize the benevolence of his heart. The Earl was ſo much pleaſed with his gueſt, that he preſſed him to remain at his caſtle till another veſſel could be procured; his gueſt equally pleaſed with the Earl, and a ſtranger to the country, accepted the invitation.

New diſtreſs now broke upon the peace of Athlin; ſeveral days had expired, and the meſſenger, who had been ſent to Malcolm, did not appear. It was almoſt evident, that the Baron, diſappointed and enraged at the eſcape of his priſoner, and eager for a ſacrifice, had ſeized this man as the ſubject of a paltry revenge. The Earl, however, reſolved to wait a few days, and watch the event.

The ſtruggles of latent tenderneſs and

and aſſumed indifference, baniſhed tranquillity from the boſom of Mary, and pierced it with many ſorrows. The friendſhip and honours beſtowed by the Earl on Alleyn, who now reſided ſolely at the caſtle, touched her heart with a ſweet pride; but alas! theſe diſtinctions ſerved only to confirm her admiration of that worth, which had already attached her affections, and afforded him opportunities of exhibiting, in brighter colours, the various excellencies of a heart noble and expanſive, and of a mind, whoſe native elegance meliorated and adorned the bold vigour of its flights. The languor of melancholy, notwithſtanding the efforts of Mary, would at intervals ſteal from beneath the diſguiſe of cheerfulneſs, and diffuſe over her beautiful features an expreſſion extremely intereſting. The ſtranger was not inſenſible to its charms, and it ſerved to heighten the admiration, with which he had firſt beheld her, into ſomething

thing more tender and more powerful. The modeſt dignity, with which ſhe delivered her ſentiments, which breathed the pureſt delicacy and benevolence, touched his heart, and he felt an intereſt concerning her, which he had never before experienced.

Alleyn, whoſe heart amid the anxieties and tumults of the paſt ſcenes, had ſtill ſighed to the image of Mary;—that image, which fancy had pictured in all the charms of the orignal, and whoſe glowing tints were yet ſoftened and rendered more intereſting by the ſhade of melancholy with which abſence and a hopeleſs paſſion had ſurrounded them, found, amid the leiſure of peace, and the frequent opportunities which were afforded him of beholding the object of his attachment, his ſighs redouble, and the glooms of ſorrow thicken. In the preſence of Mary, a ſoft ſadneſs clouded his brow; he endeavoured

voured to aſſume a cheerfulneſs foreign to his heart; but endeavoured in vain. Mary perceived the change in his manners; and the obſervation did not contribute to enliven her own. The Earl, too, obſerved that Alleyn had loſt much of his wonted ſpirits, and bantered him on the change, but thought not of his ſiſter.

Alleyn wiſhed to quit a place ſo deſtructive to his peace as the caſtle of Athlin; he formed repeated reſolutions of withdrawing himſelf from thoſe walls, which held him in a ſort of faſcination, and rendered ineffectual every half-formed wiſh, and every weak endeavour. When he could no longer behold Mary, he would frequently retire to the terrace, which was overlooked by the windows of her apartment, and ſpend half the night in traverſing, with ſilent, mournful ſteps, that ſpot, which afforded him the melancholy pleaſure of being near the object of his love.

Matilda

Matilda wiſhed to queſtion Alleyn concerning ſome circumſtances of the late events, and for this purpoſe ordered him one day to attend her in her cloſet. As he paſſed the outer apartment of the Counteſs, he perceived ſomething lying near the door, through which ſhe had before gone, and, examining it, diſcovered a bracelet, to which was attached a miniature of Mary. His heart beat quick at the ſight; the temptation was too powerful to be reſiſted; he concealed it in his boſom, and paſſed on. On quitting the cloſet, he ſought, with breathleſs impatience, a ſpot, where he might contemplate at leiſure that precious portrait, which chance had ſo kindly thrown in his way. He drew it trembling from his boſom, and beheld again that countenance, whoſe ſweet expreſſion had touched his heart with all the delightful agonies of love. As he preſſed it with impaſſioned tenderneſs to his lips, the tear of rapture trembled

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in his eye, and the romantic ardour of the moment was ſcarcely heightened by the actual preſence of the beloved object, whoſe light ſtep now ſtole upon his ear, and half turning he beheld not the picture, but the reality!—Surprized! —confuſed!—The picture fell from his hand. Mary, who had accidentally ſtrolled to that ſpot, on obſerving the agitation of Alleyn, was retiring, when he, in whoſe heart had been awakened every tender ſenſation, loſing in the temptation of the moment the fear of diſdain, and forgetting the reſolution which he had formed of eternal ſilence, threw himſelf at her feet, and preſſed her hand to his trembling lips. His tongue would have told her that he loved, but his emotion, and the repulſive look of Mary, prevented him. She inſtantly diſengaged herſelf with an air of offended dignity, and caſting on him a look of mingled anger and concern, withdrew in ſilence. Alleyn remained

fixed to the ſpot; his eyes purſuing her retiring ſteps, inſenſible to every feeling but thoſe of love and deſpair. So abſorbed was he in the tranſition of the moment, that he almoſt doubted whether a viſionary illuſion had not croſſed his ſight to blaſt his only remaining comfort—the conſciouſneſs of deſerving, and of poſſeſſing the eſteem of her he loved. He left the place with anguiſh in his heart, and, in the perturbation of his mind, forgot the picture.

Mary had obſerved her mother's bracelet fall from his hand, and was no longer in perplexity concerning her miniature; but in the confuſion which his behaviour occaſioned her, ſhe forgot to demand it of him. The Counteſs had miſſed it almoſt immediately after his departure from the cloſet, and had cauſed a ſearch to be made, which proving fruitleſs, her ſuſpicions wavered upon him. The Earl, who ſoon after paſſed

paſſed the ſpot whence Alleyn had juſt departed, found the miniature. It was not long ere Alleyn recollected the treaſure he had dropped, and returned in ſearch of it. Inſtead of the picture, he found the Earl: a conſcious bluſh croſſed his cheek; the confuſion of his countenance informed Oſbert of a part of the truth; who, anxious to know by what means he had obtained it, preſented him the picture, and demanded if he knew it. The ſoul of Alleyn knew not to diſſemble; he acknowledged that he had found, and concealed it; prompted by that paſſion, the confeſſion of which, no other circumſtance than the preſent could have wrung from his heart. The Earl liſtened to him with a mixture of concern and pity; but hereditary pride chilled the warm feelings of friendſhip and of gratitude, and extinguiſhed the faint ſpark of hope which the diſcovery had kindled in the boſom of Alleyn. "Fear not, my

Lord," ſaid he, " the degradation of your houſe from one who would ſacrifice his life in its defence; never more ſhall the paſſion which glows in my heart eſcape from my lips. I will retire from the ſpot where I have buried my tranquillity." " No," replied the Earl, " you ſhall remain here; I can confide in your honour. O! that the only reward which is adequate to your worth and to your ſervices, it ſhould be impoſſible for me to beſtow." His voice faultered, and he turned away to conceal his emotion, with a ſuffering little inferior to that of Alleyn.

The diſcovery which Mary had made, did not contribute to reſtore peace to her mind. Every circumſtance conſpired to aſſure her of that ardent paſſion which filled the boſom of him whom all her endeavours could not teach her to forget; and this conviction ſerved only

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to heighten her malady, and conſequently her wretchedneſs.

The intereſt which the ſtranger diſcovered, and the attention he paid to Mary, had not paſſed unobſerved by Alleyn. Love pointed to him the paſſion which was riſing in his heart, and whiſpered that the vows of his rival would be propitious. The words of Oſbert confirmed him in the torturing apprehenſion; for though his humble birth had never ſuffered him to hope, yet he thought he diſcovered in the ſpeech of the Earl, ſomething more than mere hereditary pride.

The ſtranger had contemplated the lovely form of Mary with increaſing admiration, ſince the firſt hour he beheld her; this admiration was now confirmed into love;—and he reſolved to acquaint the Earl with his birth, and with his paſſion. For this

purpoſe, he one morning drew him aſide to the terrace of the caſtle, where they could converſe without interruption; and pointing to the ocean, over which he had ſo lately been borne, thanked the Earl, who had thus ſoftened the horrors of ſhipwreck, and the deſolation of a foreign land, by the kindneſs of his hoſpitality. He informed him that he was a native of Switzerland, where he poſſeſſed conſiderable eſtates, from which he bore the title of Count de Santmorin; that enquiry of much moment to his intereſts had brought him to Scotland, to a neighbouring port of which he was bound, when the diſaſter from which he had been ſo happily reſcued, arreſted the progreſs of his deſigns. He then related to the Earl, that his voyage was undertaken upon a report of the death of ſome relations, at whoſe demiſe conſiderable eſtates in Switzerland became his inheritance. That the income of theſe eſtates had

had been hitherto received upon the authority of powers, which, if the report was true, were become invalid.

The Earl liſtened to this narrative in ſilent aſtoniſhment, and enquired, with much emotion, the name of the Count's relations. "The Baroneſs Malcolm," returned he. The Earl claſped his hands in extaſy. The Count, ſurprized at his agitation, began to fear that the Earl was diſagreeably intereſted in the welfare of his adverſaries, and regretted that he had diſcloſed the affair, till he obſerved the pleaſure which was diffuſed through his features. Oſbert explained the cauſe of his emotion, by relating his knowledge of the Baroneſs; in the progreſs of whoſe ſtory, the character of Malcolm was ſufficiently elucidated. He told the cauſe of his hatred towards the Baron, and the hiſtory of his impriſonment; and alſo confided to his honour the ſecret of his challenge.

The indignation of the Count was ſtrongly excited; he was, however, prevailed on by Oſbert to forego any immediate effort of revenge, awaiting for awhile the movements of Malcolm.

The Count was ſo abſorbed in wonder and in new ſenſations, that he had almoſt forgot the chief object of the interview. Recollecting himſelf, he diſcovered his paſſion, and requeſted permiſſion of the Earl to throw himſelf at the feet of Mary. The Earl liſtened to the declaration with a mixture of pleaſure and concern; the remembrance of Alleyn ſaddened his mind; but the wiſh of an equal connection, made him welcome the offers of the Count, whoſe alliance, he told him, would do honour to the firſt nobility of his nation. If he found the ſentiments of his ſiſter in ſympathy with his own on this point, he would welcome him to his family with the affection of a brother; but he wiſhed

wiſhed to diſcover the ſituation of her heart, ere his noble friend diſcloſed to her his prepoſſeſſion.

The Earl on his return to the caſtle enquired for Mary, whom he found in the apartment of her mother. He opened to them the hiſtory of the Count; his relationſhip with the Baroneſs Malcolm, with the object of his expedition, and cloſed the narrative with diſcovering the attachment of his friend to Mary, and his offers of alliance with his family. Mary grew pale at this declaration; there was a pang in her heart which would not ſuffer her to ſpeak; ſhe threw her eyes on the ground, and burſt into tears. The Earl took her hand tenderly in his; "My beloved ſiſter," ſaid he, "knows me too well to doubt my affection, or to ſuppoſe I can wiſh to influence her upon a ſubject ſo material to her future happineſs, and where her heart ought to be the princi-

pal directreſs. Do me the juſtice to believe, that I make known to you the offers of the Count as a friend, not as a director. He is a man, who from the ſhort period of our acquaintance, I have judged to be deſerving of particular eſteem. His mind appears to be noble; his heart expanſive; his rank is equal with your own; and he loves you with an attachment warm and ſincere. But with all theſe advantages, I would not have my ſiſter give herſelf to the man who does not meet an intereſt in her heart to plead his cauſe."

The gentle ſoul of Mary ſwelled with gratitude towards her brother; ſhe would have thanked him for the tenderneſs of theſe ſentiments, but a variety of emotions were ſtruggling at her heart, and ſuppreſſed her utterance; tears and a ſmile, ſofily clouded with ſorrow, were all ſhe could give him in reply. He could not but perceive that ſome ſecret

cret cauſe of grief preyed upon her mind, and he ſolicited to know, and to remove it. " My dear brother will believe the gratitude which his kindneſs ——." She would have finiſhed the ſentence, but the words died away upon her lips, and ſhe threw herſelf on the boſom of her mother, endeavouring to conceal her diſtreſs, and wept in ſilence. The Counteſs too well underſtood the grief of her daughter; ſhe had witneſſed the ſecret ſtruggles of her heart, which all her endeavours were not able to overcome, and which rendered the offers of the Count diſguſting, and dreadful to her imagination. Matilda knew how to feel for her ſufferings; but the affection of the mother extended her views beyond the preſent temporary evil, to the future welfare of her child; and in the long perſpective of ſucceeding years, ſhe beheld her united to the Count, whoſe character diffuſed happineſs, and the mild dignity of virtue to all around him.

ſhe received the thanks of Mary for her gentle guidance to the good ſhe poſſeſſed; the artleſs looks of the little ones around her, ſmiled their thanks; and the luxury of that ſcene recalled the memory of times for ever paſſed, and mingled with the tear of rapture the ſigh of fond regret. The ſureſt method of eraſing that impreſſion which threatened ſerious evil to the peace of her child if ſuffered to continue, and to ſecure her permanent felicity, was to unite her to the Count; whoſe amiable diſpoſition would ſoon win her affections, and obliterate from her heart every improper remembrance of Alleyn. She determined, therefore, to employ argument and gentle perſuaſion, to guide her to her purpoſe. She knew the mind of Mary to be delicate and candid; eaſy of conviction, and firm to purſue what her judgment approved; and ſhe did not deſpair of ſucceeding.

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The Earl ſtill preſſed to know the cauſe of that emotion which afflicted her. " I am unworthy of your ſolicitude," ſaid Mary, " I cannot teach my heart to ſubmit." " To ſubmit! —Can you ſuppoſe your friends can wiſh your heart to ſubmit on a point ſo material to its happineſs, to aught that is repugnant to its feelings? If the offers of the Count are diſpleaſing to you, tell me ſo; and I will return him his anſwer. Believe that my firſt wiſh is to ſee you happy." " Generous Oſbert! How can I repay the goodneſs of ſuch a brother! I would accept in gratitude the hand of the Count, did not my feelings aſſure me I ſhould be miſerable. I admire his character, and eſteem his goodneſs; but alas!—why ſhould I conceal it from you?—My heart is another's—is another's, whoſe noble deeds have won its involuntary regards; one who is yet unconſcious of my diſtinction, and who ſhall for ever remain

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in ignorance of it." The idea of Alleyn flashed into the mind of the Earl, and he no longer doubted to whom her heart was engaged. "My own sentiments," said he, "sufficiently inform me of the object of your admiration. You do well to remember the dignity of your sex and of your rank; though I must lament with you, that worth like Alleyn's is not impowered by fortune to take its standard with nobility." At Alleyn's name, the blushes of Mary confirmed Osbert in his discovery. "My child," said the Countess, "will not resign her tranquillity to a vain and ignoble attachment. She may esteem merit wherever it is found, but she will remember the duty which she owes to her family and to herself, in contracting an alliance which is to support or diminish the ancient consequence of her house. The offers of a man endowed with so much apparent excellence as the Count, and whose birth is equal to your

your own, affords a proſpect too promiſing of felicity, to be haſtily rejected. We will hereafter converſe more largely on this ſubject." "Never ſhall you have reaſon to bluſh for your daughter," ſaid Mary, with a modeſt pride; "but pardon me, Madam, if I entreat that we no more renew a ſubject ſo painful to my feelings, and which cannot be productive of good;—for never will I give my hand where my heart does not accompany it." This was not a time to preſs the topic; the Counteſs for the preſent deſiſted, and the Earl left the apartment with a heart divided between pity and diſappointment. Hope, however, whiſpered to his wiſhes, that Mary might in time be induced to admit the addreſſes of the Count, and he determined not wholly to deſtroy his hopes.

CHAP.

CHAPTER X.

THE Count was walking on the ramparts of the caſtle, involved in thought, when Oſbert approached; whoſe lingering ſtep and diſappointed air, ſpoke to his heart the rejection of his ſuit. He told the Count that Mary did not at preſent feel for him thoſe ſentiments of affection which would juſtify her in accepting his propoſals. This information, though it ſhocked the hopes of the Count, did not entirely deſtroy them; for he yet believed that time and aſſiduity might befriend his wiſhes. While theſe Noblemen were leaning on the walls of the caſtle, engaged in earneſt converſation, they obſerved on a diſtant hill a cloud emerging from the verge of the horizon, whoſe duſky hue glittered with ſudden light;

in an inſtant they deſcried the glance of arms, and a troop of armed men poured in long ſucceſſion over the hill, and hurried down its ſide to the plains below. The Earl thought he recognized the clan of the Baron. It was the Baron himſelf who now advanced at the head of his people, in ſearch of that revenge which had been hitherto denied him; and who, determined on conqueſt, had brought with him an hoſt which he thought more than ſufficient to overwhelm the caſtle of his enemy.

The meſſenger, who had been ſent with the challenge, had been detained a priſoner by Malcolm; who in the mean time, had haſtened his preparations to ſurprize the caſtle of Athlin. The detention of his ſervant had awakened the ſuſpicions of the Earl, and he had taken precautions to guard againſt the deſigns of his enemy. He had ſummoned his clan to hold themſelves in readineſs

readineſs for a ſudden attack, and had prepared his caſtle for the worſt emergency. He now ſent a meſſenger to the clan with ſuch orders as he judged expedient, arranged his plans within the walls, and took his ſtation on the ramparts to obſerve the movements of his enemy. The Count, clad in arms, ſtood by his ſide. Alleyn was poſted with a party within the great gate of the caſtle.

The Baron advanced with his people, and quickly ſurrounded the walls. Within all was ſilent; the caſtle ſeemed to repoſe in ſecurity; and the Baron, certain of victory, congratulated himſelf on the ſucceſs of the enterprize, when obſerving the Earl, whoſe perſon was concealed in armour, he called to him to ſurrender himſelf and his Chief to the arms of Malcolm. The Earl anſwered the ſummons with an arrow from his bow, which, miſſing the Baron, pierced one of his

his attendants. The archers, who had been planted behind the walls, now diſcovered themſelves, and diſcharged a ſhower of arrows; at the ſame time every part of the caſtle appeared thronged with the ſoldiers of the Earl, who hurled on the heads of the aſtoniſhed beſiegers, lances and other miſſile weapons with unceaſing rapidity. The alarum bell now rung out the ſignal to that part of the clan without the walls, and they immediately poured upon the enemy, who, confounded by this unexpected attack, had ſcarcely time to defend themſelves. The clang of arms reſounded through the air, with the ſhouts of the victors, and the groans of the dying. The fear of the Baron, which had principally operated on the minds of his people, was now overcome by ſurprize, and the fear of death; and on the firſt repulſe, they deſerted from the ranks in great numbers, and fled to the diſtant hills. In vain the Baron endeavoured to rally his

his ſoldiers, and keep them to the charge; they yielded to a ſtronger impulſe than the menaces of their Chief, who was now left with leſs than half his numbers at the foot of the walls. The Baron, to whom cowardice was unknown, diſdaining to retreat, continued the attack. At length the gates of the caſtle were thrown open, and a party iſſued upon the aſſailants, headed by the Earl and the Count, who divided in queſt of Malcolm. The Count ſought in vain, and the ſearch of Oſbert was equally fruitleſs; their adverſary was no where to be found. Oſbert, apprehenſive of his gaining admittance to the caſtle by ſtratagem, was returning in haſte to the gates, when he received the ſtroke of a ſword upon his ſhoulder; his armour had broke the force of the blow, and the wound it had given was ſlight. He turned his ſword, and facing his enemy, diſcovered a ſoldier of Malcolm's who attacked him with a deſperate

rate courage. The encounter was furious and long; dexterity and equal valour ſeemed to animate both the combatants. Alleyn, who obſerved from his poſt the danger of the Earl, flew inſtantly to his aſſiſtance; but the criſis of the ſcene was paſt ere he arrived; the weapon of Oſbert had pierced the ſide of his adverſary, and he fell to the ground. The Earl diſarmed him, and holding over him his ſword, bade him aſk his life. "I have no life to aſk," ſaid Malcolm, whoſe fainting voice the Earl now diſcovered, "if I had, 'tis death only I would accept from you. O! curſed——." He would have finiſhed the ſentence, but his wound flowed apace, and he fainted with loſs of blood. The Earl threw down his ſword, and calling a party of his people; he committed to them the care of the Baron, and ordered them to proceed and ſeize the caſtle of Dunbayne. Underſtanding their Chief was mortally wounded,

wounded, the remains of Malcolm's army had fled from the walls. The people of the Earl proceeded without interruption, and took poſſeſſion of the caſtle without oppoſition.

The wounds of the Baron were examined when he reached Dunbayne, and a dubious ſentence of the event was pronounced. His countenance marked the powerful workings of his mind, which ſeemed labouring with an unknown evil; he threw his eyes eagerly round the apartment, as if in ſearch of ſome object which was not preſent. After ſeveral attempts to ſpeak, "Flatter me not," ſaid he, "with hopes of life; it is flitting faſt away; but while I have breath to ſpeak, let me ſee the Baroneſs." She came, and hanging over his couch in ſilent horror, received his words: "I have injured you, Madam, I fear beyond reparation. In theſe laſt few moments let me endeavour to relieve my conſcience by diſcovering

vering to you my guilt and my remorſe." The Baroneſs ſtarted, fearful of the coming ſentence. "You had a ſon." "What of my ſon?" "You had a ſon, whom my boundleſs ambition doomed to exile from his parents and his heritage, and who I cauſed you to believe had died in your abſence." "Where is my child?" exclaimed the Baroneſs. "I know not," reſumed Malcolm, "I committed him to the care of a man and woman who then lived on a remote part of my lands, but a few years after they diſappeared, and I have never heard of them ſince. The boy paſſed for a foundling whom I had ſaved from periſhing. One ſervant only I entruſted with the ſecret; the reſt were impoſed upon. Thus far I tell you, Madam, to prompt you to enquiry, and to aſſuage the agonies of a bleeding conſcience. I have other deeds ——" The Baroneſs could hear no more; ſhe was carried inſenſible from the

the apartment. Laura, ſhocked at her condition, was informed of its cauſe, and filial tenderneſs watched over her with unwearied attention.

In the mean time the Earl, on quitting Malcolm, had returned immediately to the caſtle, and was the firſt meſſenger of that event which would probably avenge the memory of his father, and terminate the diſtreſſes of his family. The ſight of Oſbert, and the news he brought, revived the Counteſs and Mary, who had retired during the aſſault into an inner apartment of the caſtle for greater ſecurity, and who had ſuffered, during that period all the terrors which their ſituation could inſpire. They were ſoon after joined by the Count and by Alleyn, whoſe conduct did not paſs unnoticed by the Earl. The cheek of Mary glowed at the relation of this new inſtance of his worth; and it was Alleyn's ſweet reward to obſerve her

her emotion. There was a ſentiment in the heart of Oſbert which ſtruggled againſt the pride of birth; he wiſhed to reward the ſervices and the noble ſpirit of the youth, with the virtues of Mary; but the authority of early prejudice ſilenced the grateful impulſe, and ſwept from his heart the characters of truth.

The Earl, accompanied by the Count, now haſtened to the caſtle of Dunbayne, to cheer the Baroneſs and her daughter with their preſence. As they approached the caſtle, the ſtillneſs and deſolation of the ſcene beſpoke the ſituation of its lord; his people were entirely diſperſed, a few only of his centinels wandered before the eaſtern gate; who, having made no oppoſition, were ſuffered by the Earl's people to remain. Few of the Baron's people were to be ſeen; thoſe few were unarmed, and appeared the effigies of fallen greatneſs. As the Earl croſſed the platform, the remembrance of the paſt crowded upon his

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mind. The agonies which he had there ſuffered,—the image of death which glared upon his ſight, aggravated by the bitter and ignominious circumſtances which attended his fate; the figure of Malcolm, mighty in injuſtice, and cruel in power; whoſe countenance, ſmiling horribly in triumphant revenge, ſent to his heart the ſtroke of anguiſh;—each circumſtance of torture aroſe to his imagination in the glowing colours of truth; he ſhuddered as he paſſed; and the contraſt of the preſent ſcene touched his heart with the moſt affecting ſentiments. He ſaw the innate and active power of juſtice, which pervades all the circumſtances even of this life like vital principle, and ſhines through the obſcurity of human actions to the virtuous, the pure ray of Heaven;—to the guilty, the deſtructive glare of lightning.

On enquiring for the Baroneſs, they

were told ſhe was in the apartment of Malcolm, whoſe moment of diſſolution was now approaching. The name of the Count was delivered to the Baroneſs, and overheard by the Baron, who deſired to ſee him. Louiſa went out to receive her noble relation with all the joy which a meeting ſo deſirable and ſo unlooked for, could inſpire. On ſeeing Oſbert, her tears flowed faſt; and ſhe thanked him for his generous care, in a manner that declared a deep ſenſe of his ſervices. Leaving him, ſhe conducted the Count to Malcolm, who lay on his couch ſurrounded with the ſtillneſs and horrors of death. He raiſed his languid head, and diſcovered a countenance wild and terrific, whoſe ghaſtly aſpect was overſpread with the paleneſs of death. The beauteous Laura, overcome by the ſcene, hung like a drooping lily over his couch, dropping faſt her tears. "My lord," ſaid Malcolm, in a low tone, "you ſee before you a wretch,

anxious to relieve the agony of a guilty mind. My vices have deſtroyed the peace of this lady,—have robbed her of a ſon—but ſhe will diſcloſe to you the ſecret guilt, which I have now no time to tell. I have for ſome years received, as you now well know, the income of thoſe foreign lands which are her due; as a ſmall reparation for the injuries ſhe has ſuſtained, I bequeath to her all the poſſeſſions which I lawfully inherit, and reſign her into your protection. To aſk oblivion of the paſt of you, Madam, and of you, my Lord, is what I dare not do; yet it would be ſome conſolation to my departing ſpirit, to be aſſured of your forgiveneſs." The Baroneſs was too much affected to reply but by a look of aſſent; the Count aſſured him of forgiveneſs, and beſought him to compoſe his mind for his approaching fate. "Compoſure, my Lord, is not for me; my Life has been marked with vice, and my death with the bitterneſs of fruitleſs remorſe.

remorſe. I have underſtood virtue, but I have loved vice. I do not now lament that I am puniſhed, but that I have deſerved puniſhment." The Baron ſunk on his couch, and in a few moments after expired in a ſtrong ſigh. Thus terminated the life of a man, whoſe underſtanding might have reached the happineſs of virtue, but whoſe actions diſplayed the features of vice.

From this melancholy ſcene, the Baroneſs, with the Count and Laura, retired to her apartment, where the Earl awaited their return with anxious ſolicitude. The ſternneſs of juſtice for a moment relaxed when he heard of Malcolm's death; his heart would have ſighed with compaſſion, had not the remembrance of his father croſſed his mind, and checked the impulſe. "I can now, Madam," ſaid he, addreſſing the Baroneſs, "reſtore you a part of thoſe poſſeſſions which were once your

Lord's, and which ought to have been the inheritance of your ſon; this caſtle from henceforth is your's; I reſign it to its lawful owner." The Baroneſs was overcome with the remembrance of his ſervices, and could ſcarcely thank him but with her tears. The ſervant whom the Baron had mentioned as the confidant of his iniquities, was ſent for, and interrogated concerning the infant he had charge of. From him, however, little comfort was received; for he could only tell, that he had conveyed the child, by the orders of his maſter, to a cottage on the furtheſt borders of his eſtates, where he had delivered it to the care of a woman, who there lived with her huſband. Theſe people received at the ſame time, a ſum of money for its ſupport, with a promiſe of future ſupplies. For ſome years he had been punctual in the payment of the ſums entruſted to him by the Baron, but at length he yielded to the temptation of with-

with-holding them for his own uſe; and on enquiring for the people ſome years after, he found they were gone from the place. The conditions of the Baroneſs's pardon to the man, depended on his endeavours to repair the injury he had promoted, by a ſtrict ſearch for the people to whom he had committed her child. She now conſulted with her friends on the beſt means to be purſued in this buſineſs, and immediately ſent off meſſengers to different parts of the country to gather information.

The Baroneſs was now releaſed from oppreſſion and impriſonment; ſhe was re-inſtated in her ancient poſſeſſions, to which were added all the hereditary lands of Malcolm, together with his perſonal fortune: ſhe was ſurrounded by thoſe whom ſhe moſt loved, and in the midſt of a people who loved her; yet the conſequence of the Baron's guilt had left in her heart one drop of

gall which embittered each ſource of happineſs, and made her life melancholy and painful.

The Count was now her viſitor; ſhe was much conſoled by his preſence; and Laura's hours were often enlivened by the converſation of the Earl, to whom her heart was tenderly attached, and whoſe frequent viſits to the caſtle, were devoted to love and her.

The felicity of Matilda now appeared as perfect and as permanent as is conſiſtent with the nature of ſublunary beings. Juſtice was done to the memory of her Lord, and her beloved ſon was ſpared to bleſs the evening of her days. The father of Laura had ever been friendly to the houſe of Athlin, and her delicacy felt no repugnance to the union which Oſbert ſolicited. But her happineſs, whatever it might appear, was incomplete; ſhe ſaw the ſettled melancholy of Mary,

Mary, for love ſtill corroded her heart, and notwithſtanding her efforts, ſhaded her countenance. The Counteſs wiſhed to produce thoſe nuptials with the Count, which ſhe thought would re-eſtabliſh the peace of her child, and inſure her future felicity. She omitted no opportunity of preſſing his ſuit, which ſhe managed with a delicacy that rendered it leſs painful to Mary; whoſe words, however, were few in reply, and who could ſeldom bear the ſubject to be long continued. Her ſettled averſion to the addreſſes of the Count, at length baffled the expectations of Matilda, and ſhewed her the fallacy of her efforts. She thought it improper to ſuffer the Count any longer to nouriſh in his heart a vain hope; and ſhe reluctantly commiſſioned the Earl to undeceive him on this point.

With the Baroneſs, month after month ſtill elapſed in fruitleſs ſearch of

her ſon; the people with whom he had been placed where nowhere to be found, and no track was diſcovered which might lead to the truth. The diſtreſs of the Baroneſs can only be imagined; ſhe reſigned herſelf, in calm deſpair, to mourn in ſilence the eaſy confidence which had entruſted her child to the care of thoſe who had betrayed him. Though happineſs was denied her, ſhe was unwilling to with-hold it from thoſe whom it awaited; and at length yielded to the entreaties of the Earl, and became his advocate with Laura, for the nuptials which were to unite their fate.

The Earl introduced the Counteſs and Mary to the caſtle of Dunbayne. Similarity of ſentiment and diſpoſition united Matilda and the Baroneſs in a laſting friendſhip. Mary and Laura were not leſs pleaſed with each other. The dejection of the Count at ſight of Mary, declared the ardor of his paſſion, and

and would have awakened in her breaſt ſomething more than compaſſion, had not her heart been pre-occupied. Alleyn, who could think of Mary only, wandered through the caſtle of Athlin a ſolitary being, who fondly haunts the ſpot where his happineſs lies buried. His prudence formed reſolutions, which his paſſion as quickly broke; and cheated by love, though followed by deſpair, he delayed his departure from day to day, and the illuſion of yeſterday continued to be the illuſion of the morrow. The Earl, attached to his virtues, and grateful for his ſervices, would have beſtowed on him every honour but that alone which could give him happineſs, and which his pride would have ſuffered him to accept. Yet the honours which he refuſed—he refuſed with a grace ſo modeſt, as to conciliate kindneſs rather than wound generoſity.

In a gallery on the North ſide of the

caſtle, which was filled with pictures of the family, hung a portrait of Mary. She was drawn in the dreſs which ſhe wore on the day of the feſtival, when ſhe was led by the Earl into the hall, and preſented as the partner of Alleyn. The likeneſs was ſtriking, and expreſſive of all the winning grace of the original. As often as Alleyn could ſteal from obſervation, he retired to this gallery, to contemplate the portrait of her who was ever preſent to his imagination: here he could breathe that ſigh which her preſence reſtrained, and ſhed thoſe tears which her preſence forbade to flow. As he ſtood one day in this place, wrapt in melancholy muſing, his ear was ſtruck with the notes of ſweet muſic; they ſeemed to iſſue from the bottom of the gallery. The inſtrument was touched with an exquiſite expreſſion, and in a voice whoſe tones floated on the air in ſoft undulations, he diſtinguiſhed the following words, which he remembered

remembered to be an ode compoſed by the Earl, and preſented to Mary, who had ſet it to muſic the day before.

MORNING.

Darkneſs! thro' thy chilling glooms,
Weakly trembles twilight grey;
Twilight fades—and Morning comes,
And melts thy ſhadows ſwift away!

She comes in her ætherial car,
Involv'd in many a varying hue;
And thro' the azure ſhoots afar,
Spirit—light—and life anew!

Her breath revives the drooping flowers,
Her ray diſſolves the dews of night;
Recalls the ſprightly-moving hours,
And the green ſcene unveils in light!

Her's the freſh gale that wanders wild
O'er mountain top, and dewy glade;
And fondly ſteals the breath, beguil'd,
Of ev'ry flow'r in ev'ry ſhade.

Mother

Mother of Roſes—bright Aurora!—hail!
Thee ſhall the chorus of the hours ſalute,
And ſong of early birds from ev'ry vale,
And blithſome horn, and fragrant zephyr mute!

And oft as riſing o'er the plain,
Thou and thy roſeate Nymphs appear,
This ſimple ſong in choral ſtrain,
From rapturing Bards ſhall meet thine ear.

CHORUS.

Dance ye lightly—lightly on!
'Tis the bold lark thro' the air,
Hails your beauties with his ſong;
Lightly—lightly fleeting fair!

Entranced in the ſweet ſounds, he had proceeded ſome ſteps down the gallery, when the muſic ceaſed. He ſtopped. After a ſhort pauſe it returned, and as he advanced he diſtinguiſhed theſe words, ſung in a low voice mournfully ſweet:

In ſolitude I mourn thy reign,
Ah! youth belov'd—but lov'd in vain!

The

The voice was broken and loſt in ſobs; the chords of the lute were wildly ſtruck: and in a few moments ſilence enſued. He ſtepped on towards the ſpot whence the ſounds had proceeded, and through a door which was left open, he diſcovered Mary hanging over her lute diſſolved in tears. He ſtood for ſome moments abſorbed in mute admiration, and unobſerved by Mary, who was loſt in her tears, till a ſigh which eſcaped him, recalled her to reality; ſhe raiſed her eyes, and beheld the object of her ſecret ſorrows. She aroſe in confuſion; the bluſh on her cheek betrayed her heart; ſhe was retiring in haſte from Alleyn, who remained at the entrance of the room the ſtatue of deſpair, when ſhe was intercepted by the Earl, who entered by the door ſhe was opening; her eyes were red with weeping; he glanced on her a look of ſurprize and diſpleaſure, and paſſed on to the gallery followed by Alleyn, who was now awak-

ened

ened from his trance. "From you, Alleyn," ſaid the Earl, in a tone of diſpleaſure, "I expected other conduct; on your word I relied, and your word has deceived me." "Hear me, my Lord," returned the youth, "your confidence I have never abuſed; hear me." "I have now no time for parley," replied Oſbert, "my moments are precious; ſome future hour of leiſure may ſuffice." So ſaying, he walked away with an abrupt haughtineſs, which touched the ſoul of Alleyn, who diſdained to purſue him with further explanation. He was now completely wretched. The ſame accident which had unveiled to him the heart of Mary, and the full extent of that happineſs which fate with-held, confirmed him in deſpair. The ſame accident had expoſed the delicacy of her he loved to a cruel ſhock, and had ſubjected his honour to ſuſpicion; and to a ſevere rebuke from him, by whom it was his pride

pride to be reſpected, and for whoſe ſafety he had ſuffered impriſonment, and encountered death.

Mary had quitted the cloſet diſtreſſed and perplexed. She perceived the miſtake of the Earl, and it ſhocked her. She wiſhed to undeceive him; but he was gone to the caſtle of Dunbayne, to pay one of thoſe viſits which were ſoon to conclude in the nuptials, and whence he did not return till evening. The ſcene which he had witneſſed in the morning, involved him in tumult of diſtreſs. He conſidered the mutual paſſion which filled the boſom of his ſiſter and Alleyn; he had ſurprized them in a ſolitary apartment; he had obſerved the tender and melancholy air of Alleyn, and the tears and confuſion of Mary; and he at firſt did not heſitate to believe that the interview had been appointed. In the heat of his diſpleaſure he had rejected the explanation of Alleyn with a haughty

haughty reſentment, which the late ſcene alone could have excited, and which the deluſion it had occaſioned alone could excuſe. Cooler conſideration, however, brought to his mind the delicacy and the amiable pride of Mary, and the integrity of Alleyn; and he accuſed himſelf of a too haſty deciſion. The zealous ſervices of Alleyn came to his heart; he repented that he had treated him ſo rigorouſly; and on his return enquired for him, that he might hear an explanation, and that he might ſoften the aſperity of his former behaviour.

CHAP-

CHAPTER XI.

ALLEYN was no where to be found. The Earl went himſelf in queſt of him, but without ſucceſs. As he returned from the terrace, chagrined and diſappointed, he obſerved two perſons croſs the platform at ſome diſtance before him; and he could perceive by the dim moon-light which fell upon the ſpot, that they were not of the caſtle. He called to them: no anſwer was returned; but at the ſound of his voice they quickened their pace, and almoſt inſtantly diſappeared in the darkneſs of the ramparts. Surprized at this phœnomenon, the Earl followed with haſty ſteps, and endeavoured to purſue the way they had taken. He walked on ſilently, but there was no ſound to direct

rect his ſteps. When he came to the extremity of the rampart, which formed the North angle of the caſtle, he ſtopped to examine the ſpot, and to liſten if any thing was ſtirring. No perſon was to be ſeen, and all was huſhed. After he had ſtood ſome time ſurveying the rampart, he heard the low reſtrained voice of a perſon unknown, but the diſtance prevented his diſtinguiſhing the ſubject of the converſation. The voice ſeemed to approach the place where he ſtood. He drew his ſword, and watched in ſilence their motions. They continued to advance, till, ſuddenly ſtopping, they turned, and took a long ſurvey of the fabric. Their diſcourſe was conducted in a low tone; but the Earl could diſcover by the vehemence of their geſture, and the caution of their ſteps, that they were upon ſome deſign dangerous to the peace of the caſtle. Having finiſhed their examination, they turned again towards the place where the Earl ſtill remained;

mained; the ſhade of a high turret concealed him from their view, and they continued to approach till they arrived within a ſhort ſpace of him, when they turned through a ruined arch-way of the caſtle, and were loſt in the dark receſſes of the pile. Aſtoniſhed at what he had ſeen, Oſbert haſtened to the caſtle, whence he diſpatched ſome of his people in ſearch of the unknown fugitives; he accompanied ſome of his domeſtics to the ſpot where they had laſt diſappeared. They entered the arch-way, which led to a decayed part of the caſtle; they followed over broken pavement the remains of a paſſage, which was cloſed by a low obſcure door almoſt concealed from ſight by the thick ivy which overſhadowed it. On opening this door, they deſcended a flight of ſteps which led under the caſtle, ſo extremely narrow and broken as to make the deſcent both difficult and dangerous. The powerful damps of long pent-up vapours

vapours extinguiſhed their light, and the Earl and his attendants were compelled to remain in utter darkneſs, while one of them went round to the habitable part of the caſtle to relume the lamp. While they awaited in ſilence the return of light, a ſhort breathing was diſtinctly heard at intervals, near the place where they ſtood. The ſervants ſhook with fear, and the Earl was not wholly unmoved. They remained entirely ſilent, liſtening its return, when a ſound of footſteps ſlowly ſtealing through the vault, ſtartled them. The Earl demanded who paſſed;—he was anſwered only by the deep echoes of his voice. They claſhed their ſwords and had advanced, when the ſteps haſtily retired before them. The Earl ruſhed forward, purſuing the ſound, till overtaking the perſon who fled, he ſeized him; a ſhort ſcuffle enſued; the ſtrength of Oſbert was too powerful for his antagoniſt, who was nearly overcome, when the

the point of a ſword from an unknown hand pierced his ſide, he relinquiſhed his graſp, and fell to the ground. His domeſtics, whom the activity of their maſter had outran, now came up; but the aſſaſſins, whoever they were, had accompliſhed their eſcape, for the ſound of their ſteps was quickly loſt in the diſtance of the vaults. They endeavoured to raiſe the Earl, who lay ſpeechleſs on the ground; but they knew not how to convey him from that place of horror, for they were yet in total darkneſs, and unacquainted with the place. In this ſituation, every moment of delay appeared an age. Some of them tried to find their way to the entrance, but their efforts were defeated by the darkneſs, and the ruinous ſituation of the place. The light at length appeared, and diſcovered the Earl inſenſible, and weltering in his blood. He was conveyed into the caſtle, where the horror of the Counteſs on ſeeing him borne into

to

to the hall, may be eaſily imagined. By the help of proper applications he was reſtored to life; his wound was examined, and found to be dangerous; and he was carried to bed in a ſtate which gave very faint hopes of recovery. The aſtoniſhment of the Counteſs, on hearing the adventure, was equalled only by her diſtreſs. All her conjectures concerning the deſigns, and the identity of the aſſaſſin, were vague and uncertain. She knew not on whom to fix the ſtigma; nor could diſcover any means by which to penetrate this myſterious affair. The people who had remained in the vaults to purſue the ſearch, now returned to Matilda. Every receſs of the caſtle, and every part of the ramparts, had been explored, yet no one could be found; and the myſtery of the proceeding was heightened by the manner in which the men had effected their eſcape.

Mary watched over her brother in ſilent

ſilent anguiſh, yet ſhe ſtrove to conceal her diſtreſs, that ſhe might encourage the Counteſs to hope. The Counteſs endeavoured to reſign herſelf to the event with a kind of deſperate fortitude. There is a certain point of miſery, beyond which the mind becomes callous, and acquires a ſort of artificial calm. Exceſs of miſery may be ſaid to blaſt the vital powers of feeling, and by a natural conſequence conſumes its own principle. Thus it was with Matilda; a long ſucceſſion of trials had reduced her to a ſtate of horrid tranquillity, which followed the firſt ſhock of the preſent event. It was not ſo with Laura; young in misfortune, and gay in hope, ſhe ſaw happineſs fade from her graſp, with a warmth of feeling untouched by the chill of diſappointment. When the news of the Earl's ſituation reached her, ſhe was overcome with affliction, and pined in ſilent anguiſh. The Count haſtened to Oſbert, but grief

ſat heavy at his heart, and he had no power to offer to others the comfort which he wanted himſelf.

A fever, which was the conſequence of his wounds, added to the danger of the Earl, and to the deſpair of his family. During this period, Alleyn had not been ſeen at the caſtle; and his abſence at this time, raiſed in Mary a variety of diſtreſſing apprehenſions. Oſbert enquired for him, and wiſhed to ſee him. The ſervant who had been ſent to his father's cottage, brought word that it was ſome days ſince he had been there, and that nobody knew whither he was gone. The ſurprize was univerſal; but the effect it produced was various and oppoſite. A collection of ſtrange and concomitant circumſtances, now forced a ſuſpicion on the mind of the Counteſs, which her heart, and her remembrance of the former conduct of Alleyn, at once

once condemned. She had heard of what paſſed between the Earl and him in the gallery; his immediate abſence; the event which followed, and his ſubſequent flight, formed a chain of evidence which compelled her, with the utmoſt reluctance, to believe him concerned in the affair which had once more involved her houſe in miſery. Mary had too much confidence in her knowledge of his character, to admit a ſuſpicion of this nature. She rejected, with inſtant diſdain, the idea of uniting Alleyn with diſhonour; and that he ſhould be guilty of an action ſo baſe as the preſent, ſoared beyond all the bounds of poſſibility. Yet ſhe felt a ſtrange ſolicitude concerning him, and apprehenſion for his ſafety tormented her inceſſantly. The anguiſh in which he had quitted the apartment, her brother's injurious treatment, and his conſequent abſence, all conſpired to make her fear that deſpair had driven

him to commit ſome act of violence on himſelf.

The Earl, in the delirium of the fever, raved continually of Laura and of Alleyn; they were the ſole ſubjects of his ramblings. Seizing one day the hand of Mary, who ſat mournfully by his bed-ſide, and looking for ſome time penſively in her face, "weep not, my Laura," ſaid he, "Malcolm, nor all the powers on earth ſhall tear you from me; his walls — his guards —— what are they? I'll wreſt you from his hold, or periſh. I have a friend whoſe valour will do much for us;—a friend—O! name him not; theſe are ſtrange times; beware of truſting. I could have given him my very life—but not—I will not name him." Then ſtarting to the other ſide of the bed, and looking earneſtly towards the door with an expreſſion of ſorrow not to be deſcribed,

"not

" not all the miſeries which my worſt enemy has heaped upon me; not all the horrors of impriſonment and death, have ever touched my ſoul with a ſting ſo ſharp as thy unfaithfulneſs." Mary was ſo much ſhocked by this ſcene, that ſhe left the room and retired to her own apartment to indulge the agony of grief it occaſioned.

The ſituation of the Earl grew daily more alarming; and the fever, which had not yet reached its criſis, kept the hopes and fears of his family ſuſpended. In one of his lucid intervals, addreſſing himſelf to the Counteſs in the moſt pathetic manner, he requeſted, that as death might probably ſoon ſeparate him for ever from her he moſt loved, he might ſee Laura once again before he died. She came, and weeping over him, a ſcene of anguiſh enſued too poignant for deſcription. He gave her his laſt vows; ſhe

took of him a laſt look; and with a breaking heart tearing herſelf away, was carried to Dunbayne in a ſtate of danger little inferior to his.

The agitatation he had ſuffered during this interview, cauſed a return of phrenzy more violent than any fit he had yet ſuffered; exhauſted by it, he at length ſunk into a ſleep, which continued without interruption for near four and twenty hours. During this time his repoſe was quiet and profound, and afforded the Counteſs and Mary, who watched over him alternately, the conſolations of hope. When he awoke he was perfectly ſenſible, and in a very altered ſtate from that he had been in a few hours before. The criſis of the diſorder was now paſt, and from that time it rapidly declined till he was reſtored to perfect health.

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The joy of Laura, whoſe health gradually returned with returning peace, and that of his family, was ſuch as the merits of the Earl deſerved. This joy, however, ſuffered a ſhort interruption from the Count of Santmorin, who, entering one morning the apartment of the Baroneſs, with letters in his hand, came to acquaint her that he had juſt received news of the death of a diſtant relation, who had bequeathed him ſome eſtates of value, to which it was neceſſary he ſhould immediately lay claim; and that he was, therefore, obliged, however reluctantly, to ſet off for Switzerland without delay. Though the Baroneſs rejoiced with all his friends, at his good fortune, ſhe regretted, with them, the neceſſity of his abrupt departure. He took leave of them, and particularly of Mary, for whom his paſſion was ſtill the ſame, with much emotion; and it was ſome time ere the ſpace he

had left in their ſociety was filled up, and ere they reſumed their wonted cheerfulneſs.

Preparations were now making for the approaching nuptials, and the day of their celebration was at length fixed. The ceremony was to be performed in a chapel belonging to the caſtle of Dunbayne, by the chaplain of the Baroneſs. Mary only was to attend as bride-maid; and the Counteſs alſo, with the Baroneſs, was to be preſent. The abſence of the Count was univerſally regretted; for from his hand the Earl was to have received his bride. The office was now to be ſupplied by a neighbouring Laird, whom the family of the Baroneſs had long eſteemed. At the earneſt requeſt of Laura, Mary conſented to ſpend the night preceding the day of marriage, at the caſtle of Dunbayne. The day ſo long and ſo anxiouſly

anxiouſly expected by the Earl, at length arrived. The morning was extremely fine, and the joy which glowed in his heart ſeemed to give additional ſplendor to the ſcene around him. He ſet off, accompanied by the Counteſs, for the caſtle of Dunbayne. He anticipated the joy with which he ſhould ſoon retrace the way he then travelled, with Laura by his ſide, whom death alone could then ſeparate from him. On their arrival they were received by the Baroneſs, who enquired for Mary; and the Counteſs and Oſbert were thrown into the utmoſt conſternation, when they learned that ſhe had not been ſeen at the caſtle. The nuptials were again deferred; the caſtle was a ſcene of univerſal confuſion. The Earl returned home inſtantly to diſpatch his people in ſearch of Mary. On enquiry, he learned that the ſervants who had attended her, had not been

heard of ſince their departure with their lady. Still more alarmed by this intelligence he rode himſelf in purſuit, yet not knowing which courſe to take. Several days were employed in a fruitleſs ſearch; no footſtep of her flight could be traced.

CHAP.

CHAPTER XII.

MARY, in the mean time, ſuffered all the terror which her ſituation could excite. On her way to Dunbayne, ſhe had been overtaken by a party of armed men, who ſeized her bridle, and after engaging her ſervants in a feigned reſiſtance, carried her off ſenſeleſs. On recovering, ſhe found herſelf travelling through a foreſt, whoſe glooms were deepened by the ſhades of night. The moon, which was now up, glancing through the trees, ſerved to ſhew the dreary aſpect of the place, and the number of men who ſurrounded her; and ſhe was ſeized with a terror that almoſt deprived her of reaſon. They travelled all night, during which a profound ſilence was obſerved. At the dawn of day ſhe found herſelf on the

ſkirts of a heath, to whoſe wide deſolation her eye could diſcover no limits. Before they entered on the waſte, they halted at the entrance of a cave, formed in a rock, which was overhung with pine and fir; where, ſpreading their breakfaſt on the graſs, they offered refreſhments to Mary, whoſe mind was too much diſtracted to ſuffer her to partake of them. She implored them in the moſt moving accents, to tell her from whom they came, and whither they were carrying her; but they were inſenſible to her tears and her entreaties and ſhe was compelled to await, in ſilent terror, the extremity of her fate. They purſued their journey over the wilds, and towards the cloſe of day approached the ruins of an abbey, whoſe broken arches and lonely towers aroſe in gloomy grandeur through the obſcurity of evening. It ſtood the ſolitary inhabitant of the waſte,—a monument of mortality and of ancient ſuperſtition,

and

and the frowning majeſty of its aſpect ſeemed to command ſilence and veneration. The chilly dews fell thick, and Mary, fatigued in body, and haraſſed in mind, lay almoſt expiring on her horſe, when they ſtopped under an arch of the ruin. She was not ſo ill as to be inſenſible to the objects around her; the awful ſolitude of the place, and the ſolemn aſpect of the fabric, whoſe effect was heightened by the falling glooms of evening, chilled her heart with horror; and when they took her from the horſe, ſhe ſhrieked in the agonies of a laſt deſpair. They bore her over looſe ſtones to a part of the building, which had been formerly the cloiſters of the abbey, but which was now fallen to decay, and overgrown with ivy. There was, however, at the extremity of theſe cloiſters a nook, which had withſtood with hardier ſtrength the ravages of time; the roof was here entire, and the ſhattered ſtanchions of the caſements

ſtill

ſtill remained. Hither they carried Mary, and laid her almoſt lifeleſs on the graſſy pavement, while ſome of the ruffians haſtened to light a fire of the heath and ſticks they could pick up. They took out their proviſions, and placed themſelves round the fire, where they had not long been ſeated, when the ſound of diſtant thunder foretold an approaching ſtorm. A violent ſtorm, accompanied with peals which ſhook the pile, came on. They were ſheltered from the heavineſs of the rain; but the long and vivid flaſhes of lightning which glanced through the caſements, alarmed them all. The ſhrieks of Mary were loud and continued; and the fears of the ruffians did not prevent their uttering dreadful imprecations at her diſtreſs. One of them, in the fury of his reſentment, ſwore ſhe ſhould be gagged; and ſeizing her reſiſtleſs hands to execute the purpoſe, her cries redoubled. The ſervants who had

had betrayed her, were not yet ſo entirely loſt to the feelings of humanity, as to ſtand regardleſs of her preſent diſtreſs; though they could not reſiſt the temptations of a bribe, they were unwilling their lady ſhould be loaded with unneceſſary miſery. They oppoſed the ruffians; a diſpute enſued; and the violence of the conteſt aroſe ſo high, that they determined to fight for the deciſion. Amid the peals of thunder, the oaths and execrations of the combatants, added terror to the ſcene. The ſtrength of the ruffians were ſuperior to that of their opponents; and Mary, beholding victory deciding againſt herſelf, uttered a loud ſcream, when the attention of the whole party was ſurprized by the ſound of a footſtep in the cloiſter. Immediately after a man ruſhed into the place, and drawing his ſword, demanded the cauſe of the tumult. Mary, who lay almoſt expiring on the ground, now raiſed her eyes; but what were her

her ſenſations, when ſhe raiſed them to Alleyn!—who now ſtood before her petrified with horror. Before he could fly to her aſſiſtance, the attacks of the ruffians obliged him to defend himſelf; he parried their blows for ſome time, but he muſt inevitably have yielded to the force of numbers, had not the trampling of feet, which faſt approached, called off for a moment their attention. In an inſtant the place was filled with men. The aſtoniſhment of Alleyn was, if poſſible, now encreaſed; for the Earl, followed by a party, now entered. The Earl, when he perceived Alleyn, ſtood at the entrance, aghaſt! —But reſuming his firmneſs, he bade him defend himſelf. The loud voice of Oſbert re-called Mary, and obſerving their menacing attitudes, ſhe collected juſt ſtrength ſufficient to throw herſelf between them. Alleyn dropped his ſword, and raiſed her from the ground; when the Earl rudely puſhed him away,

and

and ſnatched her to his heart. "Hear me, Oſbert," was all ſhe could ſay. "Declare who brought her hither," ſaid the Earl ſternly to Alleyn. "I know not," replied he, "you muſt aſk thoſe men whom your people have ſecured. If my life is hateful to you, ſtrike! and ſpare me the anguiſh of defending it againſt the brother of Mary." The Earl heſitated in ſurprize, and the generoſity of Alleyn called a bluſh into his face. He was going to have replied, but was interrupted by ſome of his men, who had been engaged in a ſharp conteſt with the ruffians, two of whom they had ſecured, and now brought to their lord; the reſt were fled. In the perſon of one of them, the Earl diſcovered his own ſervant, who ſinking in his preſence with conſcious guilt, fell on his knees imploring mercy. "Wretch," ſaid the Earl, ſeizing him, and holding his ſword over his head, "declare by whoſe authority you have acted, and all you

you know of the affair;—remember your life depends on the truth of your aſſertions. "I'll tell the truth, my lord," replied the trembling wretch, "and nothing elſe as I hope for mercy. About three weeks ago,—no, it is not ſo much; about a fortnight ago, when I was ſent on a meſſage to the lady Malcolm, the Count de Santmorin's gentleman ——" "The Count de Santmorin!" re-echoed the whole company. "But proceed," ſaid Oſbert. "The Count de Santmorin's gentleman called me into a private room, where he told me to wait for his maſter, who would ſoon be there." "Be quick," ſaid the Earl, "proceed to facts." "I will, my lord; the Count came, and ſaid to me, "Robert, I have obſerved you, and I think you can be faithful," he ſaid ſo, my lord, — God forgive me!" "Well — well, proceed." "Where was I?"—"Oh!" he ſaid, "I think you can be faithful."—"Good God! this

is

is beyond endurance; you trifle, raſcal, with my patience, to give your aſſociates time for eſcape; be brief, or you die." "I will, my lord, as I hope for life. He took from his pocket a handful of gold, which he gave me;—'can you be ſecret, Robert?' ſaid he,—yes, my lord Count, ſaid I, God forgive me! —'Then obſerve what I ſay to you. You often attend your young lady in her rides to Dunbayne.'—"What, then it was the Count de Santmorin who commiſſioned you to undertake this ſcheme!" "Not me only, my lord." "Anſwer my queſtion; was the Count the author of this plot?" "He was, my lord." "And where is he?" ſaid Oſbert, in a ſtern voice. "I know not, my lord." "You know not! Wretch! remember—your life" "I know not, as I am a living creature. He embarked, as you know, my lord, not far from the caſtle of Dunbayne, and we were travelling to a diſtant part of the coaſt

coaſt to meet him, when we were all to have ſet ſail for Switzerland." "You cannot be ignorant of the place of your deſtination," ſaid the Earl, turning to the other priſoner; "where is your employer?" "That is not for me to tell," ſaid he, in a ſullen tone. "Reveal the truth," ſaid the Earl, "turning towards him the point of his ſword, "or we will find a way to make you," "The place where we were to meet the Count, had no name." "You know the way to it." "I do" "Then lead me thither." "Never!" "Never! Your life ſhall anſwer the refuſal," ſaid Oſbert, pointing the ſword to his breaſt. "Strike!" ſaid the Count, throwing off the cloak which had concealed him; "ſtrike! and rid me of a being which paſſion has made hateful to me;—ſtrike!—and make the firſt moment of my entering this place, the laſt of my guilt." A faint ſcream was uttered by Mary; the ſmall remains of her ſtrength

forſook

forſook her, and ſhe ſunk on the pavement. The Earl ſtarted a few ſteps back, and ſtood ſuſpended in wonder. The looks of the whole group defy deſcription. "Take a ſword," ſaid the Earl, recovering himſelf, "and defend your life." "Never, my lord, never! Though I have been hurried by the force of paſſion to rob you of a ſiſter, I will not aggravate my guilt by the murder of the brother. Your life has already been once endangered through my means, though not by my deſign; Heaven knows the anguiſh which that accident coſt me. The impetuoſity of paſſion impelled me onward with irreſiſtible fury; it urged me to violate the ſacred duties of gratitude—of friendſhip—and of humanity. To live in ſhame, and in the conſciouſneſs of guilt, is a living death. With your ſword do juſtice to yourſelf and virtue; and ſpare me the miſery of long comparing what I am, with what I was." "Away—

you

you trifle," ſaid the Earl, "defend yourſelf." The Count repeated his refuſal. "And you, villain," ſaid Oſbert, turning to the man who had confeſſed the plot, "you pretended ignorance of the preſence of the Count; your perfidy ſhall be rewarded." "As I now plead for mercy, my lord, I knew not he was here." "The fellow ſpeaks truth," ſaid the Count, "he was ignorant of the place where he was to meet me. I was approaching this ſpot to diſcover myſelf to the dear object of my paſſion, when your people ſuprized and took me." Mary confirmed the teſtimony of the Count, by declaring that ſhe had not till that moment ſeen him ſince ſhe quitted the caſtle of Dunbayne. She pleaded for his life, and alſo for the ſervants, who had oppoſed the cruelty of their comrades. "I am no aſſaſſin," ſaid the Earl, "let the Count take a ſword, and fight me on equal terms." —— "Shall virtue be reduced to an

equality

equality with vice?" ſaid the Count, "No, my lord, —— plunge your ſword in my heart, and expiate my guilt." The Earl ſtill urged him to defence; and the Count ſtill perſiſted in refuſal. Touched by the recollection of paſt friendſhip, and grieved that a ſoul like the Count's ſhould ever be under the dominion of vice, Oſbert threw down his ſword, and, overcome with a ſort of tenderneſs—"Go, my lord, your perſon is ſafe; and if it is neceſſary to your peace, — ſtretching forth his hand,—take my forgiveneſs." The Count, overcome by his generoſity, and by a ſenſe of his own unworthineſs, ſhrunk back: "Forbear, my lord, to wound by your goodneſs, a mind already too ſenſible of its own debaſement; nor excite, by your generoſity, a remorſe too keen to be endured. Your reproaches I can bear,—your vengeance I ſolicit,—but your kindneſs inflicts a torture too exquiſite for my ſoul." "Never, my Lord," continued he, the

big

big tear ſwelling in his eye,—" never more ſhall your friendſhip be polluted by my unworthineſs. Since you will not ſatisfy jüſtice, by taking my life, I go to loſe it in the obſcurity of diſtant regions. Yet, ere I go, ſuffer me to make one laſt requeſt to you, and to that dear lady whom I have thus injured, and on whom my eyes now gaze for the laſt time,—ſuffer me to hope that you will blot from your memory the exiſtence of Santmorin." He concluded the ſentence with a groan, which vibrated upon the hearts of all preſent; and without waiting for a reply, hurried from the ſcene. The Earl had turned away his head in pity, and when he again looked round to reply, perceived that the Count was departed; he followed his ſteps through the cloiſter,—he called—but he was gone.

Alleyn had obſerved the Count with a mixture of pity and admiration; and he

he ſighed for the weakneſs of human nature. "How," ſaid the Earl, returning eagerly to Alleyn, —"how can I recompenſe you for my injurious ſuſpicions, and my injurious treatment?—How can you forgive, or I forget, my injuſtice? But the myſtery of this affair, and the doubtful appearance of circumſtances, muſt ſpeak for me." "O! let us talk no more of this, my lord," replied Alleyn, with emotion; "let us only rejoice at the ſafety of our dear lady, and offer her the comfort ſhe is ſo much in want of." The fire was rekindled, and the Earl's ſervants laid before him ſome wine, and other proviſions. Mary, who had not taſted any food ſince ſhe left the caſtle, now took ſome wine; it revived her, and enabled her to take other nouriſhment. She enquired, what happy circumſtance had enabled the Earl to trace her route. "Ever ſince I diſcovered your flight," ſaid he, "I have been in purſuit of you.

Chance directed me over theſe wilds, when I was driven by the ſtorm to ſeek ſhelter among theſe ruins. The light, and an uproar of voices, drew me to the cloiſter, where, to my unutterable aſtoniſhment, I diſcovered you and Alleyn: Spare me the remembrance of what followed." Mary wiſhed to enquire what brought Alleyn to the place; but delicacy kept her ſilent. Oſbert, however, whoſe anxiety for his ſiſter had hitherto allowed him to attend only to her, now relieved her from the pain of lengthened ſuſpenſe. "By what ſtrange accident was you brought hither?" ſaid he to Alleyn, "and what motive has induced you ſo long to abſent yourſelf from the caſtle?" At the laſt queſtion, Alleyn bluſhed, and an involuntary ſigh eſcaped him. Mary underſtood the bluſh and the ſigh, and awaited his reply in trembling emotion. "I fled, my lord, from your diſpleaſure, and to tear myſelf from an object too

too dangerous, alas! for my peace. I ſought to wear away in abſence, a paſſion which muſt ever be hopeleſs, but which, I now perceive, is interwoven with my exiſtence.—But forgive, my lord, the intruſion of a ſubject which is painful to us all. With ſome money, and a few proviſions, I left my father's cottage; and ſince that time have wandered over the country a forlorn and miſerable being, paſſing my nights in the huts which chance threw in my way, and deſigning to travel onward, and to enliſt myſelf in the ſervice of my country. Night overtook me on theſe waſtes, and as I walked on comfortleſs and bewildered, I was alarmed by diſtant cries of diſtreſs. I quickened my pace; but the ſound which ſhould have directed my ſteps was ceaſed, and chilling ſilence enſued. As I ſtood muſing, and uncertain which courſe to take, I obſerved a feeble light break through the gloom; I endeavoured to follow its

rays; it led me to theſe ruins, whoſe ſolemn appearance ſtruck me with a momentary dread. A confuſed murmur of voices from within ſtruck my ear; as I ſtood heſitating whether to enter, I again heard thoſe ſhrieks which had alarmed me. I followed the ſound; it led me to the entrance of this cloiſter, at the extremity of which I diſcovered a party of men engaged in fight; I drew my ſword and ruſhed forward; and the ſenſations which I felt, on perceiving the lady Mary, cannot be expreſſed!" "Still, —ſtill Heaven deſtines you the deliverer of Mary!" ſaid the Earl, gratitude ſwelling in his eyes; "O! that I could remove that obſtacle which with-holds you from your juſt reward!" A reſponſive ſigh ſtole from Alleyn, and he remained ſilent. Never was the ſtruggle of oppoſing feelings more violent, than that which now agitated the boſom of the Earl. The worth of Alleyn aroſe more conſpicuouſly bright from every

ſhade

ſhade with which misfortune had veiled it. His noble and diſintereſted enthuſiaſm in the cauſe of juſtice, had attached him to the Earl, and had engaged him in a courſe of enterprizes and of dangers, which it required valour to undertake, and ſkill and perſeverance to perform; and which had produced ſervices for which no adequate reward could be found. He had reſcued the Earl from captivity and death; and had twice preſerved Mary in dangers. All theſe circumſtances aroſe in ſtrong reflection to the mind of Oſbert; but the darkneſs of prejudice and ancient pride, oppoſed their influence, and weakened their effect.

The joy which Mary felt on ſeeing Alleyn in ſafety, and ſtill worthy of the eſteem ſhe had ever bore him, was daſhed by the bitterneſs of reflection; and reflection imparted a melancholy which added to the languor of illneſs.

At the dawn of day they quitted the abbey, and ſet forward on their return to the caſtle; the Earl inſiſting upon Alleyn's accompanying them. On the way, the minds of the party were variouſly and ſilently engaged. The Earl ruminated on the conduct of Alleyn, and the late ſcene. Mary dwelt chiefly on the virtues of her lover, and on the dangers ſhe had eſcaped; and Alleyn muſed on his defeated purpoſes, and anticipated future trials. The Earl's thoughts, however, were not ſo wholly occupied, as to prevent his queſtioning the ſervant who had been employed by the Count, concerning the further particulars of his ſcheme. The words of the Count, importing that he had once already endangered his life, had not eſcaped the notice of the Earl; though they were uttered in a moment of too much diſtraction to ſuffer him to demand an explanation. He now enquired of the man, concerning the myſterious ſcene of the vaults.

"You

"You, I ſuppoſe, are not ignorant who were the perſons from whom I received my wound." "I, my lord, had no concern in that affair; wicked as I am, I could not raiſe my hands againſt your life." "But you know who did." I —I—ye—yes, my lord, I was afterwards told.—But they did not mean to hurt your lordſhip." "Not mean to hurt me!—What then were their deſigns, and who were the people?" "That accident happened long before the Count ever ſpoke to me of his purpoſe. Indeed, my lord, I had no hand in it; and Heaven knows how I grieved for your lordſhip; and ——" "Well —well, inform me, who were the perſons in the vaults, and what were their deſign." "I was told by a fellow ſervant; but he made me promiſe to be ſecret; but it is proper your lordſhip ſhould know all; and I hope your lordſhip will forgive me for having liſtened to it.—'Robert,' ſaid he, as

we were talking one day of what had happened;—'Robert,' ſaid he, 'there is more in this matter than you, or any body thinks; but it is not for me to tell all I know.' With that, I begged he would tell me what he knew; but he ſtill kept refuſing. I promiſed him faithfully I would not tell; and ſo at laſt he told me—'Why, there is my lord Count there, he is in love with our young lady; and to be ſure as ſweet a lady ſhe is, as ever eyes looked upon; but ſhe don't like him; and ſo finding himſelf refuſed, he is determined to marry her at any rate; and means ſome night to get into the caſtle, and carry her off.' "What, then!—was it the Count who wounded me?—Be quick in your relation." "No, my lord, it was not the Count himſelf—but two of his people, whom he had ſent to examine the caſtle; and particularly the windows of my young lady's apartment, from whence he deſigned to have carried

carried her, when every thing was ready for execution. Thoſe men were let within the walls through a way under ground, which leads into the vaults, by my fellow ſervant, as I afterwards was told; and they eſcaped through the ſame way. Their meeting with your lordſhip was accidental, and they fought only in ſelf-defence; for they had no orders to attack any body." "And who is the villain that connived at this ſcheme?" "It was my fellow ſervant, who fled with the Count's people, whom he himſelf let within the ramparts. Forgive me, my lord; but I did not dare tell; he threatened my life, if I betrayed the ſecret."

After a journey of fatigue, and unpleaſant reflections, they arrived on the ſecond morning at the caſtle of Athlin. The Counteſs, during the abſence of her ſon, had endured a ſtate of dreadful ſuſpenſe. The Baroneſs, in her friendſhip,

ſhip, had endeavoured to ſoothe her diſtreſs, by her conſtant preſence; ſhe was engaged in this amiable office, when the trampling of horſes in the court reached the ears of Matilda. "It is my ſon," ſaid ſhe, riſing from her chair!—"it is my ſon; he brings me life or death!" She ſaid no more, but ruſhed into the hall, and in a moment after claſped her almoſt expiring daughter to her boſom. The tranſport of the ſcene repelled utterance; ſobs and tears were all that could be given. The general joy, however, was ſuddenly interrupted by the Baroneſs, who had followed Matilda into the hall; and who now fell ſenſeleſs to the ground; delight yielded to ſurprize, and to the buſineſs of aſſiſting the object of it. On recovering, the Baroneſs looked wildly round her;—"Was it a viſion that I ſaw, or a reality?" The whole company moved their eyes round the hall, but could diſcover nothing extraordinary.

nary. " It was himſelf; his very air, his features; that benign countenance which I have ſo often contemplated in imagination!" Her eyes ſtill ſeemed in ſearch of ſome ideal object; and they began to doubt whether a ſudden phrenzy had not ſeized her brain. " Ah! again! ſaid ſhe, and inſtantly relapſed. Their eyes were now turned towards the door, on which ſhe had gazed; it was Alleyn who entered, with water which he had brought for the Counteſs, and on whom the attention of all preſent was now centered. He approached ignorant of what had happened; and his ſurprize was great, when the Baroneſs, reviving, fixed her eyes mournfully upon him, and aſked him to uncover his arm.—" It is,—it is my Philip!" ſaid ſhe, with ſtrong emotion; I have, indeed, found my long loſt child; that ſtrawberry on his arm confirms the deciſion. Send for the man who calls himſelf your father,

and for my ſervant Patrick." The ſenſations of the mother and the ſon may be more eaſily conceived than deſcribed; thoſe of Mary were little inferior to theirs; and the whole company awaited with trembling eagerneſs the arrival of the two perſons whoſe teſtimony was to decide this intereſting affair. They came. "This young man you call your ſon?" ſaid the Baroneſs. "I do, an' pleaſe your ladyſhip," he replied, with a degree of confuſion which belied his words. When Patrick came, his inſtant ſurprize on ſeeing the old man, declared the truth. "Do you know this perſon?" ſaid the Baroneſs to Patrick. "Yes, my lady, I know him too well; it was to him I gave your infant ſon." The old man ſtarted with ſurprize—"Is that youth the ſon of your ladyſhip?" "Yes!" "Then God forgive me for having thus long detained him from you! but I was ignorant of his birth, and received him into

into my cottage as a foundling ſuccoured by lord Malcolm's compaſſion." The whole company crowded round them. Alleyn fell at the feet of his mother, and bathed her hand with his tears.—" Gracious God! for what haſt thou reſerved me!" He could ſay no more. The Baroneſs raiſed him, and again preſſed him in tranſport to her heart. It was ſome time before either of them could ſpeak; and all preſent were too much affected to interrupt the ſilence. At length, the Baroneſs preſented Laura to her brother. " Such a mother! and have I ſuch a ſiſter!" ſaid he. Laura wept ſilently upon his neck the joy of her heart. The Earl was the firſt who recovered compoſure ſufficient to congratulate Alleyn; and embracing him—O happy moment, when I can indeed embrace you as my brother! The whole company now poured forth their joy and their congratulations; — all but Mary, whoſe

emotions almoſt overcame her, and were too powerful for utterance.

The company now adjourned to the drawing-room; and Mary withdrew to take that repoſe ſhe ſo much required. She was ſufficiently recovered in a few hours to join her friends in the banquetting-room.

After the tranſports of the ſcene were ſubſided—"I have yet much to hope, and much to fear," ſaid Philip Malcolm, who was yet Alleyn in every thing but in name. "You, madam," addreſſing the Baroneſs,—"you will willingly become my advocate with her whom I have ſo long and ſo ardently loved." "May I hope," continued he, taking tenderly the hand of Mary, who ſtood trembling by,—"that you have not been inſenſible to my long attachment, and that you will confirm the happineſs which is now offered me?"

A ſmile

A ſmile of ineffable ſweetneſs broke through the melancholy which had long clouded her features, and which even the preſent diſcovery had not been able entirely to diſſipate, and her eye gave the conſent which her tongue refuſed to utter.

The converſation, for the remainder of the day, was occupied by the ſubject of the diſcovery, and with a recital of Mary's adventure. It was determined that on the morrow the marriage of the Earl ſhould be concluded.

On this happy diſcovery, the Earl ordered the gates of the caſtle to be thrown open; mirth and feſtivity reſounded through the walls, and the evening cloſed in univerſal rejoicings.

On the following morn, the chapel of the caſtle was decorated for the marriage of the Earl; who with Laura, came attended by Philip, now Baron Malcolm, by Mary, and the whole family. When they approached the altar, the Earl addreſſing himſelf to his bride,

bride,—" Now, my Laura," ſaid he, " we may celebrate thoſe nuptials which have twice been ſo painfully interrupted, and which are to crown me with felicity. This day ſhall unite our families in a double marriage, and reward the worth of my friend. It is now ſeen, that thoſe virtues which ſtimulated him to proſecute for another the cauſe of juſtice, myſteriouſly urged him to the recovery of his rights. Virtue may for a time be purſued by misfortune.—and juſtice be obſcured by the tranſient triumphs of vice,—but the power whoſe peculiar attributes they are, clears away the clouds of error, and even in this world reveals his THRONE OF JUSTICE."

The Earl ſtepped forward, and joining the hands of Philip and Mary,—" Surely, ſaid he, this is a moment of perfect happineſs!—I can now reward thoſe virtues which I have ever loved; and thoſe ſervices to which every gift muſt be inadequate, but this I now beſtow."

FINIS.